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Norman Levine: *Short Story*

Ripostes to George Urban:
Martin Esslin, Edward Pearce, et al.

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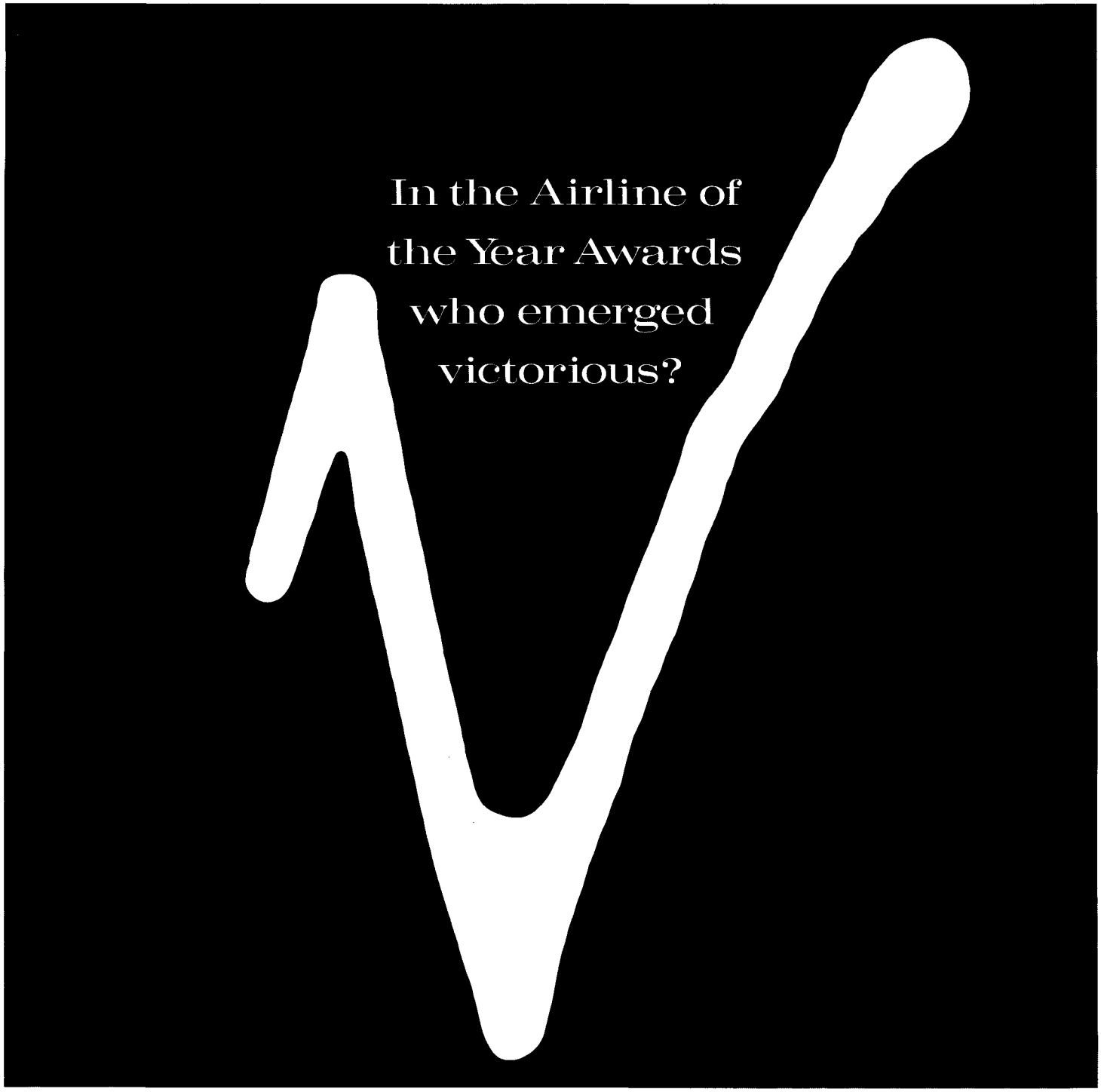

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CONTENTS

Ten (Provisional) Theses	*Daniel Johnson*	3
Soap Opera (*story*)	*Norman Levine*	6
The Maple Leaf For Ever?	*Peter Brimelow*	18
Column	*M*	25

POEMS

John Levett 5, *György Petri* 17, *Michael Thorpe* 24, *Michael Henry* 27, *Dannie Abse* 28, *Selwyn Pritchard* 37

MEN & IDEAS

Darkness Encroaching	*Stephen Watson*	30

NOTES & TOPICS

A Tory Seer	*Geoffrey Wheatcroft*	38
Ah, Calcutta!	*Carolyne Wright*	39

SPECIAL BOOK SECTION: BIOGRAPHY & MEMOIRS

Dark Corners	*Stephen Wilson*	43
Lord Byron: Dramaturg	*Richard Lansdown*	46
Two Historians	*Max Beloff*	51
A Talent Unfulfilled	*J. G. Links*	55
Books Encountered	*R.M.*	58

DISCUSSION

Views on George Urban's "Paradox"	*Martin Esslin (59), Edward Pearce (60), Klaus Schütz (60), Victoria Maximova (61), R. V. Burks (62), Herb Greer (64)*	

CONTROVERSY

The Catastrophe of Modern Theatre	*Curt Riess*	66

MEDIA

Of Humbugs & Sweethearts	*Herb Greer*	70

THEATRE

Of Inspiration & Effort	*Malcolm Rutherford*	74

IN THE MARGIN

Barbarian Sentiments & Civilised Advice	*Anthony Hartley*	76

BOXES

Better Worlds (*Rainer Maria Brandt*) 61, Television & The Dark Ages (*Ian L. Mitroff*) 63, TV & Revolution (*Brenda Maddox*) 64, Vandalising the Bard (*Charles Osborne*) 67, Of Artistic Taste & Aesthetic Hunger (*Welt am Sonntag*) 68

AUTHORS 65 — LETTERS 79 — LIFE & LETTERS 81

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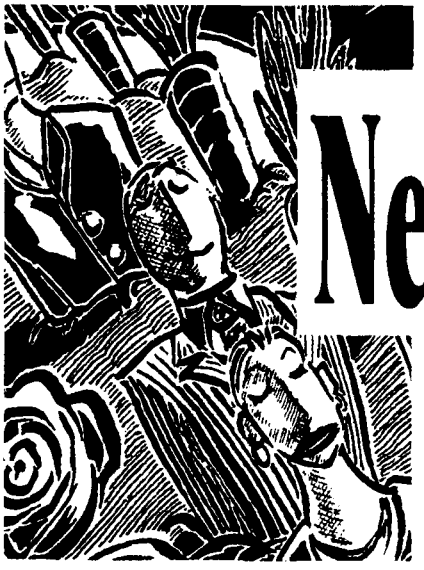

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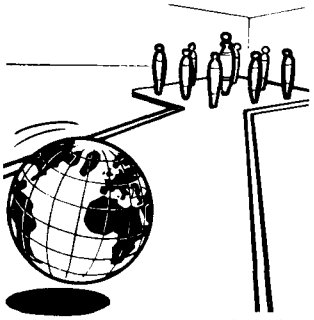
Daniel Johnson

Ten (Provisional) Theses

On Central Europe's Conservative Revolution

"He alone is a revolutionary who can revolutionise himself."
LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN *(c. 1944)*



AS THE DUST settles on Central Europe's conservative revolution, comes the question: why was it not foreseen?

For those born since the mid-1950s, the autumn of 1989 was a consummation of wishes long repressed by an overbearing consciousness of the improbability of their fulfilment. We scarcely dared to hope that the end, if it came at all, would come so swiftly. Most of us had made our peace with the physical bisection of our continent, and believed it to be metaphysical.

Our elders were of little assistance. Though they could remember a time before the sub-Manichaean siege mentality of Communism had split Europe asunder, most had long since convinced themselves that what they remembered of Central Europe was merely the present tyranny's squalid, fascistoid *alter ego*. What seemed irrevocable was reviled, what seemed irreversible was revered. And so the young, too, were permitted to become servants of the great lie: the lie that history, geography and economics were on the side of the *status quo*, that stability was the most that could be hoped for.

Those who might have gestured beyond the unquestioning acceptance of this mysticism of factuality were too terrified of the sham strength of the Communist legions to turn the tables on them by predicting the imminent exhaustion of the system. Because Communism had proved resilient, it was assumed to be virtually invulnerable. I remember how in 1977 a British Communist of the old school, the Scottish miners' leader Mick McGahey, elaborated through a haze of alcohol in a Brighton pub his philosophy of the inevitability of gradualness: "Every year we advance a little further. We never retreat. How can we lose?"

One of the great oracles of ENCOUNTER, Jean-François Revel, wrote a book in the early 1980s, *How Democracies Perish*, which illustrates the intellectual plight of the continental Right in those days when faced with the steady expansion of the Communist camp. It derived not merely from the reverses suffered by the West on the margins of its heartlands: the loss of Cuba, Viet Nam and South-east Asia, much of Africa, Nicaragua, and most recently Afghanistan, but also from the apparent willingness of public opinion to acquiesce in the defeatist interpretations placed upon these temporary setbacks by the intellectual fashion-setters.

Revel thought, like Spengler or Gobineau before him, that he was writing a pathology of European civilisation faced with self-immolation: "The aim of this book is to describe in detail the implacable democracy-killing machine this world of ours has become", he wrote. "There may be some satisfaction in understanding how it works, even if we are powerless to stop it."

IN THE WEST the fatalism of failure has been replaced by the fatalism of success. Fanfares ring out in the United States for the triumph of liberalism, which is equated with the end of history (or more precisely of un-American activities). A black, red and golden age seems to be dawning in Germany. Here in Britain, the apparently final extinction of socialism as a credible political platform has passed almost without comment.

The icing on the cake will be the fall of the last great bastion: the Soviet Union itself. Nothing less now appears to be encompassed by the discontent along the USSR's northern, western and southern borders. For this too, we—the generation which will have to live in a post-Communist world—are ill-prepared to make good the mistakes which are quite clearly going to be made by the West's present leadership.

These mistakes are not merely a matter of human fallibility: they will derive from a false diagnosis of the kind of change that has happened in Central Europe, and from a genuine problem of terminology. The diagnosis which is widely accepted in the West suggests that a gradually declining tolerance of the centrally planned economic system has combined with outrage at abuses of human rights to produce a volatile situation, into which the introduction of almost any

DANIEL JOHNSON, *now a leader writer for "The Times" in London, was previously Bonn Correspondent for the "Daily Telegraph" and Eastern Europe Correspondent for the "Daily Telegraph" and "Sunday Telegraph". His earlier contribution to* ENCOUNTER *(April 1989) was a study of West Germany entitled "New Megalomania or New Patriotism?"*

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new element could have produced spontaneous combustion.

The only terminology we have in which to describe what has happened in Central Europe is derivative from past revolutions, all of which have been led from the Left—that is, by the ideological ancestors of the very tyrannies that have just been overthrown. We have found the notion of a revolution led by the Right—a "conservative revolution", (no one has yet spoken of "counter-revolution")—so distasteful that almost any other hypothesis was considered worthier of an airing than this one. Indeed, as if to forfend against the acceptance of the idea of a popular and successful uprising against the Left, the forces against which the mass movements of Central Europe were directed—the Communist Parties themselves, with their countless associates and hard-line militant surrogates—were themselves *ab initio* designated "conservatives".

The idea of the conservative revolution was popular in the Weimar Republic, but was never generally adopted by the Nazis to describe their own "seizure of power" and its consequences. It has never recovered from the discrediting it received at the hands of German and Austrian intellectual dandies of the 1920s, including a handful of great writers like Ernst Jünger and Hugo von Hofmannsthal. But there is nothing intrinsically anti-conservative about the concept of revolution; nor is conservatism unrevolutionary.

Conservatism is a political persuasion which draws its strength from the deepest strata of human nature. Its revolutionary potential springs from a dash of early 19th-century Romanticism, allied with the corrosive force of the open and free market which, once treated with suspicion by the conservative temperament, is now wholeheartedly embraced by it. This subversive tendency of conservatism has, moreover, been reinforced by its insuperable scepticism towards the 20th century's secular ideologies, of which Communism is merely the most prominent and enduring.

CONSERVATISM proved to be such a formidable opponent of the Communist order in Central Europe because it could mobilise the reserves of submerged humanity which the authorities had decreed extinct. National sentiments had been trampled underfoot, religious ceremonies suborned, and traditional habits held up to ridicule by the Communist Central Committees and their cadres. The dead weight of the bureaucratic class and the suppression of cherished freedoms by the Security Apparatus might, by themselves, have been endured. But the Communists were never content with the subordination of civil liberties to requirements of state. Their vision had originally encompassed the extinction of individual and national identities, and the substitution of human constructs for the creatures of God.

It was this process of systematic pulverisation and progressively more total sacrilege, carried out over many years and intended to wipe out the most treasured moments of these nations' past, the most secret yearnings for their future, which turned the scales for the majority. The younger generation—of whose loyalty to the pre-Communist hierarchy of values many of their broken-hearted elders had despaired—rose and dared their contemporaries in uniform to slaughter them in cold blood. The rest of society—in Adam Ferguson's 18th-century phrase, now become a mass slogan—the whole "civil society" was shamed into solidarity, thereby deliberately risking revolution.

For the sake of restoring meaning to their lives—frozen in a shabby ideological state, an eternal *now*, where the passing of time had lost all value—the nations of Central Europe telescoped the decay of Communism, which might have lasted for decades, into a matter of months—into weeks and days that "shook the world". Or, rather, ten years (in Warsaw), ten months (in Budapest), ten weeks (in Leipzig), ten days (in Prague).

WHAT IS THE significance of Central Europe's conservative revolution for history—that is, for the future? This is too large a question, evidently, to be answered with the aid of that rough-cut, often glib phraseology which was pressed into use by all the journalists and commentators who found themselves entrusted with the task of interpreting the cataclysm. We had no time to ponder the dizzying historical or philosophical implications of the complex events we were croaking down bad telephone lines.

But though there is still no pause, no real intermezzo in the grand opera, it is possible to hazard a few easily falsifiable but general propositions. These ten theses will doubtless seem as outdated in ten months as virtually the entire literature on "the Revolution of 1989" became last year.

(1) The popularity of Mikhail Gorbachov, itself contingent and highly dependent on his supposed place in history as the gravedigger of orthodox Communism, will shortly evaporate, revealing the cadaverous nature of the Soviet body politic.

(2) Communism is destined for an oblivion more total even than that suffered by fascism and National Socialism after 1945. All traces of Marxism-Leninism will be extinguished from public life; the suppression of Communist Parties will follow. Even in the Russian heartlands, the role of the Marxist ideology over the past 70 years will be diminished, and its origins as a foreign import turned against its former advocates.

(3) A great revival of the Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Churches is already under way in Central Europe. It is likely that this will lead to a restoration of the prestige of Christianity in the West, and a consequent return to a measure of orthodoxy within the Western Churches.

(4) The governments and opposition parties of Central Europe will obviously be more variegated than the uneasy coalitions which are now at the helm. But they are not likely to occupy the whole breadth of the Western political spectrum. Not only will the extreme Left be absent; there will also be no substantial constituency to support the "democratic socialism" with which the ex-Communists hope to perpetuate the outlines of the dying order. Even social democracy will have a hard time of it: the economic circumstances will not be propitious, and the dismal record of the West European social democrats in appeasing Communist régimes will count against them.

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(5) "The national question" will dominate political debate, merely by virtue of its past suppression. But prophecies of regional wars are premature; it will not come to that, provided the quality of thoughtful political leadership attained last autumn is maintained.

(6) Anti-Semitism will appear to become more prevalent in Central Europe, but rather because its previous ubiquitousness was overlooked or disguised than because its incidence will suddenly increase.

(7) We stand on the verge of a flowering of European culture, as the artificial impoverishment in both East and West of literature and the liberal arts, evident since 1945, is at last made good.

(8) Within a decade, most of Central Europe—first Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Hungary, but later also Poland, Romania, Ukraine, and the Baltic States—will have reached the state of economic development now enjoyed by the southern members of the European Community—but only provided they continue wholeheartedly to implement the radical free-market policies pioneered in Poland (and now also adopted in Czechoslovakia by the new people around President Havel). In order to maintain the tempo of transformation, it will be necessary for Central European governments to send packing many of the self-appointed Western advisers from such institutions as the European Community, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and various "freelance" banks and proselytising "Institutes". Doubtless the survival of old fashioned pre-War manners in these countries will make it easier for them to reject the proffered poisoned chalice without offending the individuals concerned. But rejected they must be: Chancellor Adenauer's old anti-socialist slogan during the years of the West German "economic miracle" is likely to become the motto also of these struggling economies: "No more experiments!"

(9) In those Central European states which were constitutional monarchies before World War II, the possibility of a restoration—in Romania, Hungary, and Albania, at least—cannot be completely ruled out. But nations judge forms of governance for the most part according to pragmatic criteria, and the pre-War kings unfortunately failed to shield Central Europe from military or fascist dictatorships. That said, the dictum of the German sociologist Max Weber—that constitutional monarchs, by removing the formal highest office in the state from political contention, may contribute to stability—is not to be dismissed lightly. The conservative character of these revolutions could quite well be translated into a desire for a monarchical restoration. But the interval since deposition is now probably too great. The post-Napoleonic restorations were mostly short-lived affairs, and that was after only about half the period (much less in the case of the Habsburgs) that has elapsed since the crowned heads of Central Europe went into exile.

(10) Central Europe will undoubtedly revert to its pre-War condition of economic dependence on Germany, assuming—as we are entitled to assume—that reunification of "the two Germanies" takes place in fairly short order. But this need not, and almost certainly will not, bring political subservience in its train. The West German Federal Republic is admired today in Central Europe because it provides the nearest and most spectacularly successful example of the transition from totalitarian centralisation to democratic individualism, from a closed to an open society. There is nothing sinister or provincial about this—quite simply, no other model is to hand. The Czechs and the Poles, the Hungarians and the Yugoslavs need no lectures from the West (London pundits, Washington columnists) about the dangers of German hegemony. To assume that they do is patronising, pernicious, and counter-productive. It is a time of "the breaking of nations", and of their national myths.

Nets

They shroud domestic mysteries,
dusk's dumb-shows where the half-a-chance
we've waited half our lives for never comes.
Dim privacies, the bioluminescence of T.V.,
scorched daffodils, the white, narcotic twitch,
unsympathetic stitches, puffs and glooms,
and chunky clocks like cuff-links, antlered lights;
all floss spun from abstractions, love and thrift
in padded cells, soft sofas, glassy flames.

On cool spring nights, inflated like bibbed frogs,
you sometimes see their whiteness gathered in;
ringed hands emerge from closed suburban lives
still moist with soap and oestrogen or shrunk
to scentless parchments, forty years apart,
yet side by side down avenues and lanes
and hauling in their catch before it rains.

John Levett

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Norman Levine

Soap Opera

I PHONED my mother in Ottawa just after 6 p.m. No reply. A few minutes later I tried again. Then I took Fred, mostly beagle, out for his walk . . . through the small park . . . (at twelve he still has this rapid acceleration and expects me to throw a tennis ball for him to chase) . . . around the reservoir and the wall of green trees that hide the ravine. In front, by the path, were the four saplings planted a few years ago with the name-plates: *In Memory of My Beloved Papa Joseph Podobitko*. I wondered who Joseph Podobitko was. I had asked the Portuguese gardener, who looked after the grounds, if Joseph Podobitko had worked here. He told me that Joseph Podobitko didn't work here. He didn't know who he was, and it cost $300 to put up one of those saplings.

I came back to the house with Fred and phoned again. I tried the Civic Hospital. I asked if she was a patient. Silence. Then her voice (slow and shaky) said "Hello."

"When did you go in?"

"This morning at ten." It was an effort for her to talk. "I'm just played out."

"I'll see you tomorrow", I said. "I'll take the early train."

That evening I phoned my sister Sarah in Carleton Place. She had come to Ottawa and had been staying with Mother for a week.

"I couldn't take it any more", Sarah said. "She doesn't want to live. She has given up."

"A person who calls an ambulance and gets herself admitted as an emergency case hasn't given up."

"But you don't know what she talks about."

"I'll take the early train", I said. "It gets in around noon."

"I'll be with her in the morning and you will be with her in the afternoon."

"Yes", I said. "We'll get together later."

My mother was on the fifth floor of the surgical ward in a room by herself. When I walked in she was asleep, propped up by pillows. I was dismayed at how she had changed. I brought one of the grey leather chairs to the side, sat, and waited.

It was a large air-conditioned room with two windows. The blinds were half-way down, the curtains half-way across. On a small table, by the bed, a telephone. On a chest of drawers some flowers wished her a speedy recovery. On the wall a painting, a reproduction, of two rowing-boats by a blue pier with the moon out. The room had another room within it. A private bathroom. All the walls were orange and cream. And the doors light blue. The large front door was opened back as far as it could go. And on it a name-plate: *Donated by Mr Thomas Sachs*.

She opened her eyes.

"Hello, Mother."

"Have you been here long?"

"No. It's a nice large room."

"I paid into Blue Cross", she said weakly, "for semi-private. But they put me in here. Do you think they made a mistake?"

"I wouldn't think so."

She looked up at the two standing metal forms beside her. One had a bag that was giving her blood. It was almost empty. The other, water. And that was full. She watched closely, as I did, as the drops appeared.

"What did the doctor say?"

"That I have jaundice. That I'm bleeding inside. But they say they can stop that. He's a very nice man."

"Was Sarah here in the morning?"

"Yes."

"How is Sarah?"

"Hysterical. She looks at me and laughs. Then she cries."

We were silent.

"Help me up."

I put my hand behind her back and eased her forward. I was surprised at the thickness of the spine, how much it protruded, and how light she was. She sat, with her head down, as if waiting for strength to return.

"I can't eat", she said in despair.

THERE WERE small cardboard containers on the table by her bed. "Would you like this?" It was prune juice. "This one?" Orange juice. "This?" A white purple thing labelled *Ensure*. She answered by an almost imperceptible movement of her head. I put in a stubby straw, bent it near the top, and held the *Ensure* while she sipped it all. Then she reached, slowly, for the box of Kleenex on her bed and, carefully, dried the corners of her mouth.

Again we were silent.

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"You will stay in the apartment?"

"Yes."

With a finger she pointed to the dresser by the wall. I opened the top drawer and saw a large beige purse.

"Take the keys. . . . Have you got the keys?"

I showed them to her.

"In the fridge . . . help yourself. There is coffee. Eat whatever you like. You have my permission."

"I'll water the plants."

"It would be better if I didn't have them."

"How much water do you give?"

"Not too much. Every two or three days."

"Anything you want me to bring?"

"The small key is for the mail-box. . . . See if any mail. In the dining-room . . . in the drawer . . . are two cheques. Six hundred dollars and something. Take the bank-book . . . pay in my account."

I said I would.

She wanted to be eased back to the way she had been.

"Mrs Tessier, across the hall, takes in *The Citizen*. Tell her you are in the apartment and you will have the paper. I have paid three months in advance. . . . I don't think I'll go back there. I'll go to some other place for a rest."

The large blue eyes. The grey hair, usually neatly combed up, was loose on the sides. She did not have her teeth in and her mouth looked small. I thought of her independent nature, the quick intelligence, and how she coped with things.

"I'm all played out", she said. "But I'm not tired of living."

She watched the blood and the water drip.

"It's working", I assured her.

But she continued to watch.

"Another doctor came", she said. "A young doctor. He asked me questions about my operations. He said I had some kind of anaemia that only Jews from East Europe have. Did you know about that?"

"No."

"He said the mother passes it to her siblings. Does that mean daughters?"

"Sons and daughters."

We were silent.

"Do you want to see anyone?"

She said no with her head.

"If anyone phones. If anyone in the building asks. Say I have gone in the hospital for tests. Don't say anything more. Just tests."

"Yes."

Again we were silent.

"I'm going to close my eyes now", she said.

The closed eyes made the socket bones more visible. Faint sunlight was on her face and on the far wall. I knew nothing of her life in Poland except what she told me. "I liked a young man, a redhead. He was a scholar. My mother and father didn't think he could make a living. . . . At my wedding they threw money in pails . . . we had a large house and a servant. When I was coming to Canada she begged me to take her." Then the difficult early years in Ottawa that she doesn't want to be reminded of. And for the last twenty-one years on her own, in a Senior Citizen building, opposite a small park. I thought again of her generous nature, how independent she was, and how she came out with unexpected things.

Her eyes opened.

"I need a bed-pan", she said in a low voice.

A white flex, with a white button on it, was held to one of the pillows by a safety pin. I picked up the flex and pressed the button. A snapping sound and a slight electric shock.

"When the nurse comes I'll go", I said. "And I'll come tomorrow. Sarah said she would be here as well."

I went over and kissed her on the forehead.

"With jaundice I don't think you should kiss."

I OPENED the door of her apartment. In the half-light I could see the three small rooms. Brought the suitcase in, quickly drew the curtains, opened the windows. All the clocks had stopped.

The place looked as if it was left in a hurry. In the kitchen, dishes on the draining-board were upside down. In the bedroom the large bed was not made. A dress was on the back of the rocking-chair. Two-tone, beige and brown shoes were under the bed. The calendar, by the window, had not been changed in two months.

She had kept everything neat and clean. Now a thin layer of dust was on the furniture and on the wooden floor. And on the leaves of the plants in the front room. The earth was dry. I watered the plants. Looked in the fridge. A few potatoes were sprouting. The pears were bruised and had started to go rotten. I couldn't understand why Sarah hadn't tidied up. There was some half-used cottage cheese, a bottle of apple juice, a tin of *Ensure*. The cupboard, by the sink, was packed with tins as if for a siege. I made a cup of coffee, brought it into the front room, sat by the table, and started to relax.

I had not been here on my own before. How small and still. And full of light. The chesterfield set, from the house, was too large. She brightened the settee with crocheted covers—bands of red, yellow, green—that kept slipping down. And cushions with embroidered leaves of all kinds. The same was on the chair, by the side of the window, overlooking the street and the small park. (The Lombardy poplars are gone. But the gazebo is there. And kids throwing a ball around.) On the other side of the window, against the wall, a large black-and-white television was on the floor. No longer working. Its use, to support the plants on its top. Beside it: the glass-enclosed wooden cabinet with her best dishes, best cups, saucers, the Chinese plate that goes back to my childhood, the Bernard Leach mugs and bowl that I brought back on visits from St Ives. On top of the cabinet a family tree. Small,

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round, black and white photographs in metal frames hung from metal branches. Father and mother, in the park by the river, some fifty years ago. Sarah and I . . . when we were around ten and eight . . . the people we married . . . our children . . . with their husbands . . . their children. . . .

The room's centrepiece was the nickel-plated samovar. On the long wooden dresser, against the far wall, with the mirror above it. Two silver candlesticks were on either side. A brass pestle and mortar. A silver tray. And more plants, lots of them, just leaves in various shapes and sizes.

Above the settee, two small paintings of people at the Wailing Wall. Beside it a framed diploma-looking paper with a red seal at the bottom.

First Distinguished Service Award
Presented to
The Dedicated Men and Women
Past and Present of
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"What do you do?"
"Sew shrouds."
I said nothing.
"It's an honour", she said indignantly. "Not everyone gets asked."

On the wall, a watercolour of St Ives (signed Holland). It was done from the Malakoff, overlooking the harbour, before TV aerials were on the cottages. I grew up in Ottawa with this watercolour. And in all those years we didn't know what it was. In 1949 I left for England. Five years later I made my first visit back. Paid the taxi, walked into the house, kissed them, and saw the watercolour.

"That is where I live in England."
No reaction from either of them.
The phone rang.
"Hello."
"Annie?"
"No, it's her son."
"Where's your mother?"
"In hospital."
"Not again. What is it this time?"
"They don't know. She's gone in for tests."
The telephone was loud. I had to hold it away.
"Who shall I say phoned?"
"Tell her that Phyllis Steinhoff called. We belong to the Golden Age Club. We go and play bingo together."
"I'll tell her."
Silence.
"Your mother is a lovely woman. She is intelligent. And she is nice."

I went to the door, directly opposite in the hall, and knocked. Mrs Tessier, small, gentle, dumpy, with brown eyes and glasses, opened the door. She always looked cheerful.

"Hello, Mrs Tessier. I came because my mother is in hospital."
"How is your mother?"
"Not well."
"What is wrong?"
"They don't know. She is in for tests."
"You want the paper?"
"Yes."
She disappeared.
"You want the others?"
"No, just today's."
"How long you here?"
"Two or three days."
"I hope your mother come home soon."

I DECIDED to change the bed linen. The linen cupboard was packed tight with neatly folded sheets, pillow-cases, and towels. I was taking out a couple of pillow-cases when I saw a used brown envelope. It was unsealed. Inside were dollar bills. Twenties, tens, fives, twos and ones. I counted. It came to a hundred and eighty dollars. When I took out the sheets I saw more used brown envelopes, unsealed, also with money. I counted all the money. It came to $2,883.00. I put my hand between other sheets, pillow-cases, towels. No more envelopes, but a small battered cardboard box held together by red elastic bands. Inside, large silver coins that I remembered as a child. A double eagle on one side, two heads on the other. She had brought them over with the samovar, the candlesticks, the pestle and mortar, the silver tray.

It was humid and hot. I had a bath. Then phoned Sarah. She was staying with her daughter Selina and her family on the outskirts. I asked Sarah if she knew about the money.

"Yes."
"Do you know how much there is?"
"No."
"Two thousand eight hundred and eighty-three dollars."
"It's for her funeral. She told me what to do when she dies. I have to call Pettigorsky from the burial society right away. She wants no autopsy. The coffin must be the Jewish way. No nails. Shiva she wants private. At her place. Only the family. And she wants me to get someone to say Kaddish for her. I'll pay him from that money."
"She hasn't mentioned any of this to me."
"When I'm with her that's all she talks about."

NEXT DAY I WALKED to the bank on Rideau near the market, and paid the government cheques into her account. Then to the Rideau Centre, got on a bus to the hospital. Sarah was sitting in a leather chair by the bed. Mother was asleep. She was having another blood transfusion. The water was dripping as well. Sarah saw me. "Hi", she said and smiled. We both walked quietly over and kissed.

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"How is she?"

"Most of the time she sleeps."

"Has the doctor been?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"He said, 'We are not going to let your mother die'."

We were silent.

"She doesn't have cancer", Sarah said.

Another silence.

"Why didn't she keep the money in the bank?"

Mother opened her eyes.

"I couldn't put the money in the bank", she said slowly. "If I did I would have to pay more rent."

I sat her up. Got some juice and a straw. She didn't have the strength to hold it. When she finished and wiped her lips, she said, "It is not necessary to put this in a story."

"I only write about people I like."

She wasn't convinced.

"Phyllis Steinhoff phoned", I said.

"You didn't tell her anything."

"That you were having tests."

Silence.

"And Dinka called", I said.

"Is she in Ottawa?"

"Yes, for the weekend. Do you want to see her?"

"No", she said quietly.

We were silent again.

"How old is Dinka?"

"She is four years older than me and she runs around like a girl."

"Did she marry again?"

"She did. But she asked him to leave."

Another silence.

"In your letter-box", I said, "you had a notice saying that men are coming next week to clean your windows."

"No", she said. "I don't want anyone to go in there. It's dirty. Write on a piece of paper Mrs Miller doesn't want her windows washed. Then stick the paper, with tape, on the outside of the door. You get the tape in the dresser of the living-room."

Another silence.

She wanted to be eased back, propped up by the pillows. I suggested to Sarah that as I'm here she might like a break and have a coffee in the cafeteria.

When Sarah left I told mother what was in the news. "Waldheim was elected President of Austria." She looked surprised. "The Blue Jays are not doing so good. It's their pitching." I showed her photographs of St Ives that I took on my last visit. "Do you remember that summer . . . the two weeks you were there?"

"It was the best holiday I had."

"You used to walk along the beach and pick the small pink shells at the tideline."

"I still have them."

We were silent.

"I'm going to close my eyes now", she said.

When Sarah came we went out in the corridor.

"What else did the doctor say?"

"That she still has jaundice. Why they don't know. He said they were thinking of doing an operation to find out. She is all for it. 'I don't want to go on like this', she said. 'If they can do anything—let them do it.' But they think she is a poor risk and wouldn't survive. She's not eating."

A nurse came and woke her to take a sample of blood. I told Sarah I would go to the waiting-room at the end of the corridor.

On the way I saw a young doctor.

"They took a piece of her liver", I said.

"When was that?"

"On Friday. How long will it take?"

"The pathologists are in a class by themselves. They take their time."

"I guess we'll just have to wait."

"I don't think whatever they find will make much difference."

In a room with the door open I saw a nurse by the bed of a patient. A tube was being shoved down her throat.

"Let me die."

"Swallow it, dear, as if it is a piece of bread."

"Let me die."

"I'm not allowed to. Now swallow it for me, dear, as if it is a piece of bread."

I returned to my mother's room.

"Selina is coming in a half-hour", Sarah said, "to pick me up for supper. She's invited you as well."

"You'll go", Mother said.

She knew I didn't want to.

Whenever I arrived from Toronto to see her. And after we had eaten and had a talk. She would say, "Call up Sarah. Call up Selina."

I said nothing.

"Do it for me."

Selina had been in Toronto for two days at a real-estate conference. (She is high up in the company.) And was coming from the airport to the hospital. We were walking, from the hospital, to Selina's car when Selina stopped.

"She's going to die."

"Yes", I said.

SELINA WAS Sarah's only child. A tall pale woman with blonde hair, a small face, a nice smile, blue eyes. She looked pretty but anaemic. And there was a toughness about her. The few times I did go to their house she inevitably forced a confrontation.

She had tried teaching, advertising. But she hadn't found what she was good at until she went into real-estate. She was married to George (he was fourteen years older) who smoked a pipe, worked in the Civil Service, and spoke in a slow, deep voice. They lived in a large new house, in a wind-swept field, on a housing estate near a lake. The nearest place, Rockliffe, was some ten miles away. Their son, Scott, had his

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mother's eyes and complexion, but looked oddly serious. "He's very clever", my mother told me. Then, lowering her voice as if she was going to tell me something she shouldn't, "He's a genius." Scott's favourite reading was stocks and shares. But at twelve he wasn't allowed to play the market. I once asked him if he played sports. "Football", he said. "What position?" "Centre forward—I'm very good."

I don't remember the meal. It was afterwards—when we went into the large sitting-room with the Eskimo carvings, the Indian paintings—that Selina started.

"This is the first time for you. All the other years you weren't here. We had to take her to the hospital. See her through the operations. While you were away in England."

"You're lucky", I said. "You know her in a way that I don't."

An awkward silence.

"Why did you go away?" Selina asked.

"I had to."

"You didn't have to. You could have stayed and got a job in the government."

"I had to leave", I said. "The family doctor told me to get away."

"Why would he say a thing like that?"

"Because of her", I said. "He told me to get as far away from home as possible. She was too strong. She dominated the rest of the family. Because she could do things well she wouldn't let anyone else do anything. I saw what she did to father. And he was devoted to her. She was trying to do the same to me." I stopped from saying—and look what she did to Sarah.

Then George said, "When you come on a visit she doesn't want us to know you are in Ottawa."

Another silence.

"Selina thinks we should sit Shiva here", Sarah said.

"What's wrong with her apartment?"

"It's too small", Selina said. "Three people in there and there's no room to move."

"But here—it's miles from anywhere."

"All the people who would come", George said, "have cars."

I thought I knew what was not being said. My mother's apartment was not only small; it was in a Senior Citizens' place. And I could see it was no longer going to be a private, a small family thing, but a social occasion.

"I'll be here for the funeral", I said. "But I won't sit Shiva."

"Why not?" Sarah shouted. "It's therapy."

"I don't believe in it."

"But for Ma."

"To remember someone", George quietly said to Sarah, "you don't have to sit Shiva."

He had, on marrying Selina, converted to being a Jew.

"You don't have any feeling for this family." Selina was angry. "You just don't have it."

IN MY MOTHER'S APARTMENT I couldn't go to sleep. I finished reading *The Citizen*. There were no books. Only those I gave her that she kept hidden, in the bedroom, in drawers. They were in mint condition, signed to my father and to her. Then only to her. She is the only one in the family who reads my things.

I was looking for a photograph of my father—a studio photograph, of how he looked before he came to Canada—and couldn't find it. But I did find a glass jar with the small pink shells that she collected on the beach in St Ives. And faded cuttings—from *The Journal* and *The Citizen*, of my early books—that I had forgotten. Some large boxes of chocolates, unopened. Horoscopes that she cut from the paper. (Sarah was also an Aries.) A flyer that said: "Your psychic portrait rendered by the combined skills of an astrologist and of an artist. Strategically placed in your home, it allows for meditation on self, and to work out one's destiny." And it gave two telephone numbers.

In her clothes closet, at the bottom, large leather purses. Brown, beige, black. And none looked used. Inside they had loose change and a wrapped toffee or two. There were small yoghurt containers filled with pennies. One had American pennies. The other Canadian. Some were bright as if newly minted. I saw a small hand-mirror. The glass was cracked. I remember it because of the black and white drawing on the back—a woman's face and neck and dense black hair. I last saw it as a child on her dresser in the bedroom. Now, the drawing didn't look right. I turned the hand-mirror upside down. The drawing became another drawing. A woman had her hand in her pubic hair. I felt an intruder. I didn't want to look any more.

NEXT MORNING I walked to Rideau Street and to the Rideau Bakery. On visits I always drop in to buy some bread. I bought a rye, to take back to Toronto, when one of the owners came in from the back. (We both went to York Street School.) He was talking to a well-dressed woman when he saw me.

"Going to see your mother?"

"Yes."

"This is Mrs Miller's son." He introduced me to Mrs Slover, a furrier's wife.

"Your mother", said Mrs Slover, "is a very nice person." Then, looking directly at me, "Are you a nice person?"

"No", I said.

"Give her my regards when you see her. She is a lovely lady." And walked quickly away.

The owner of the Rideau Bakery looked confused.

"And remember me to your mother", he said quickly.

"She's in hospital", I said.

She was asleep when I entered her room. There was only the drip. I went out into the corridor, towards the reception desk, when I met the surgeon. A stocky

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man, with glasses, from Newfoundland. He was in-between operations. They were, he said, still trying to find out why she wasn't eating. I told him I had someone coming from England. Would it be all right if I went back to Toronto. How long would I be away? About five days. He hesitated. "That should be all right."

I returned to the room. When she opened her eyes I gave her some *Ensure*. And said I would be going to Toronto, as Henry, a friend from St Ives, was due tomorrow evening. I'd stay the weekend. And be back to see her the following week.

"The surgeon has my phone number."

"Did you have a nice time at Selina's?"

"Yes."

We remained silent.

"I'm going to close my eyes now."

After she woke, I said I would leave as I wanted to pack and close the apartment.

On the open front door I saw the name-plate.

"Who is Mr Thomas Sachs?"

"A bachelor", she said.

In the Union Station, waiting for Henry to arrive, I am early and having a coffee. And think how lucky I was to have grown up with painters. Painters are much more open than writers. They seem to enjoy their work more—more extrovert. And Henry was like that. When I first knew him he and his wife Kath were working in a café opposite. Porthmeor Beach. And Henry painted when he could. He had one of the studios (large, spartan) facing the Beach. And let me use it. The tall end windows (that looked out on sand, surf, the hovering gulls) had a wide window-sill. I had my typewriter on the sill and wrote while Henry painted behind me. I could hear him talking to himself. "Look at that green. . . . That red sings. . . ." And when the work was going well he would sing quietly: "Life is just a bowl of cherries." Just that line. And when a painting was finished he wanted me to see it. I said I liked it. "But it is so still. Quiet."

"All good paintings", he said, "have a feeling of calm about them."

Henry began to paint in Germany as a prisoner-of-war. "I got canvas from the pillow-cases. Oil from the odd tin of sardines." He also went hungry. After the War he married. Left a struggling working-class home, in the provinces, to come to St Ives. He had a thing about those who were (like us) in St Ives but who had private incomes or parents with money. This didn't bother me. I guess you have to be English to have this love-hate with class. I remember when one of our lot (money behind him) won a prize for one of his paintings. We met in the pub by the parish church and the War Memorial garden. He bought Henry and me a beer.

When we left the pub Henry was angry. "A half-pint of bloody beer. Christ, if I'd won that money I'd have bought everyone double whiskies."

After that summer, and those early years, we moved apart. I heard he was teaching in an art school near London. I read about his exhibitions in the paper. Sometimes I saw him, briefly, in London. It was still a struggle.

More years passed.

Then in the spring of 1980 I came to Toronto. I was living in a modest high-rise in Yorkville. When Henry phoned, he was in Toronto. He had flown from Alberta and was on his way back to England. Could I come to this restaurant and join him for dinner.

The taxi brought me to a seedy street near Kensington Market. I went up a narrow, worn-out staircase. Turned into a barn-like room. Lots of tables. No customers. A man was behind a small bar by the wall near the door. A woman, in a simple all-black dress, came towards me. I asked for Henry. She led me through a door to a room in the back.

It was all red. The wallpaper was a deep red. Red lights were on the walls. The tablecloths were red. The small lights, on the tables, had red lampshades. There was only one person in the room. Henry, sitting by a large red table and smiling.

"It's a brothel", he said.

We had a platter of sea-food. We drank and talked. About our friends, our children, and what we had been doing. He had been a guest lecturer at Banff for two months. Things, he said, were beginning to pick up. But he still had to hustle.

After the meal we went into the other room, stood at the bar, drank with the proprietor and his wife. Neither could speak much English. She was telling me that her husband played football for Portugal when a slight man, in a light-grey summer suit, joined us. He must have had his meal somewhere in the large room, but we didn't notice. He said he was an American. After a while he said he worked for the CIA. Still later, Henry and the CIA man began to dance. I danced with the proprietor's wife. Then we all put our arms over the shoulder of the person on either side. The proprietor joined us. And we moved around the empty restaurant as a chorus line, Henry singing "Life is just a bowl of cherries".

Out in the street we asked the CIA man where he was staying. The Windsor Arms. So we walked to the nearest main road and waited for a taxi to drive by. The grey light of early morning. It was cold and shabby. A gusty wind. Loose newspapers. And no cars. The CIA man began to take out dollar bills from his jacket pockets and threw them up into the air. The wind blew them away. Henry and I went after the loose bills . . . on the road . . . the sidewalk . . . across the street . . . and stuffed them back into the man's pockets. Then he took them out again and threw them in the air. And again we went after them. . . . Until a taxi finally came along.

Since then Henry has called that night magical. A word I never use.

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THIS TIME he had flown from England to New York. Spent four days looking at galleries and museums. Then took the train to Toronto.

"It's marvellous", he said in the taxi. "I don't have to lecture or teach or flog my paintings. I can do just what I want to do. Enjoy myself. And I have enough money not to pinch and scrape. From here, I'll go to Vancouver. See *Expo*. Then fly back."

He liked Fred. I showed him his room. We both got dressed up. Henry in a light blue silk jacket, a silk shirt, light blue trousers, a black beret.

"How's your Mum?"

"Dying."

"She knows you know", he said.

Henry is tall and stocky with a grey moustache and glasses. A woman I know, who saw us walking down Yonge Street, phoned up after he had gone and asked, "Who was that policeman you were with?"

We were having a drink before going out. His eldest son was acting in the West End in a Stoppard play. His youngest was studying languages in Munich. "And playing cricket for the MCC."

"I didn't know he was that good."

"The Munich Cricket Club. After a game if he's done well he will phone. If he doesn't phone I know he didn't get many runs."

It is only after we have told each other about our families that we get on to work.

"I've never been so busy", Henry said. "I can barely cope. I think it's to do with age. It is so strange to be so busy that there is never a minute to spare. Not until I sit down in the evening and fade out in front of the TV. I can hardly believe it. My early work continues to sell. I am so confused. I don't know whether to stop letting the last few things go or just treble the prices."

The taxi arrived.

He was excited.

"Where are we going?"

The taxi stopped on a badly lit street by some garbage. There was an open door, a worn-out staircase.

Henry was smiling. "It's the same place."

There was the man and the woman. They said they remembered us. I don't know if they did. The front barn of a room had no customers. We asked if we could go to the back. She said, in poor English, it was closed.

We sat, by a table, against a wall. And all those white laid-out empty tables stretched in front of us.

The proprietor sat in front of a large TV screen. It was raised and could be seen all over the room. Benny Hill was chasing some girls who kept dropping their clothes.

The woman in the black dress came to take our order. In a firm but friendly voice Henry said, "We'll have champagne."

The woman went away.

Henry looked relaxed and happy.

She returned to say no champagne.

"No champagne", Henry said. "Bloody hell."

"Last night a wedding. No champagne."

He looked upset.

"Shall we have a Scotch?"

"Yes", I said.

She went away.

We were silent.

"You know", Henry said, "I wanted to come and see you. Go to a restaurant. And just say: We'll have champagne. I remember at The Tinners . . . I was strapped for money . . . I was nursing a half-pint of bitter . . . when in walked John Friel. And it was the way he said, in that arrogant plummy voice of his, a bottle of champagne. I thought, someday I'm going to do that."

We started with Portuguese sardines.

I told him that last summer I went to Paris and Marseille with a woman who opened up France for me. And it was in a small fishing place near Marseille, called Cassis, where I had the best sardines.

"I was in Marseille", he said, "before France fell. I was in the cavalry. We went to a brothel. There were three of us. All young. We kept coming back. They began to charge us hardly anything. They were glad to see us. I wondered why."

"Did you come back to the same girl?"

"Yes", he said. "I decided they had two-way mirrors. They made their money from those who watched my ass going up in the air."

"Did you like the girl?"

"Oh yes", he said. "I liked her."

NEXT NIGHT I took him to an Italian restaurant, on St Clair West, where I knew the food was good, and Henry said he liked Italian food. And the same thing happened. He asked for champagne. The proprietor, who was our waiter, looked sullen.

He came back with a bottle of Asti Spumante.

"I don't believe it", Henry said. "That's no champagne."

We drank bottles of Asti Spumante and were having a fairly good time.

The proprietor remained sullen. Finally he walked out.

"He probably has a mistress", Henry said. "Or else he has gone gambling."

His wife was the cook. A small pretty woman in a low-cut dress. Black hair, very white skin, large dark eyes, perspiration above her top lip. She had to finish serving the meal.

"I stayed in London with Adrian Oakes", Henry said. "The night before flying over. He had a girl, staying with them, that he had just before breakfast. His wife doesn't mind. It's the upper classes. His father gave him a mistress when he was twenty. He's been used to it since. Not like us."

When we got back we walked Fred around the park. Ahead, in the sky, I could see Orion.

Back in the house we drank and talked about Peter

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Lanyon, Patrick Heron, Terry Frost, Alan Lowndes. And the crazy things we did.

"I remember", I said, "how we all got dressed up in suits to go to Peter's funeral. And one of your sons saw us walking in the street. 'You look like a bunch of gangsters', he said."

"Who is normal?" Henry asked. "Do you know anyone who is normal? My mother's sister was called Ida Bolt. As Ida Bolt she was quiet and passive. And no one took any notice. But she also called herself Jennie Dempsey. And as Jennie Dempsey she would wiggle her hips, pretend she was dancing to the radio, jump with excitement. A complete extrovert. When she died the only people who came were those she played the piano for in a mental hospital."

Near the end he said, "There's hardly anybody left in St Ives. No one to talk to. Oh, I talk to a lot of people—but we don't go back very far."

NEXT MORNING, before seven, Henry was up. And we took Fred out for his morning walk. I have to give Fred a tennis ball so that he doesn't bark and wake up people. He gets excited as I open the door. And will leave the ball for me to throw. He doesn't wait but starts to run fast ahead. Then stops, crouches. And looks at me. When he was young, when I pitched the ball, he would catch it in his mouth. Now he misses. So I throw it over him or to one side so he can chase it. He also chases the black and grey squirrels. They always get to a tree before he can get to them. I don't think he would do anything. He just likes chasing. Then he goes off into his own world and will sniff the grass and not move for several minutes. I whistle. I call "Cmon Fred". Finally he does. Or else he goes on his back and twists his body on the grass.

Walking with Henry . . . he was noticing shapes and I was noticing colours . . . then he saw that Fred was waiting for us.

"He's smiling."

"He always has that expression on his face", I said.

We went to the galleries in Yorkville. Saw some early Hans Hofmann. "I wouldn't mind having one of those", he said. At another gallery he liked the Borduas and the Riopelles. As we came out from a gallery on Scollard we came out above the street.

"There's a painting right here", he said.

I saw a red mail-box, a green metal container beside it, a cluster of three glass globes at the top of a lamp-post, a cherry tree in blossom.

"What do you look for?"

"Surfaces", he said. "That green beside the mail-box. That has a flat top. The red mail-box has a curved top. Then the cherry tree. The shape of the street lights."

We went to the Art Gallery of Ontario. I knew some of the paintings. Van Gogh's *woodcutters in winter*. A lovely little Renoir landscape. We go up a ramp and, on the wall, beside us, Patrick Heron's *Nude* of 1951; Peter Lanyon's *Botallack* of 1952; and Henry's *A snow day of grey* of 1953.

Henry looked pleased. "I didn't know it was here."

For lunch, in The Copenhagen, we ordered duck with red cabbage.

"Gino came to see me in Cornwall", Henry said. "I can't remember his second name. It's my memory. He was in the Italian Army. In the last war. He fought on the other side. He came to see me because he likes my work. When I told him I would be in Toronto he said to go and see a sculpture of his. Here's the envelope with the address."

In neat small writing: *Bell Canada H.Q. Trinity Square Building. Business Hours.*

We went to find it.

I don't know about Henry but I didn't expect too much. But there it was. Impressive. A tall piece of metal, with a gold coating, as a central column. And from it rods came out at right angles, as if from a spine. And these rods were close together. They went up and down the centre column. Not in a straight line but a gentle curve. And then back. The effect—when you looked at it or walked slowly around—was as if those rods were gently moving.

"Breathing", Henry said.

It went up several floors.

"It really works". Henry was delighted.

We both went to see where it had Gino's name. And what he called it. But there was no plaque, no sign, nothing to say that Gino had done it.

I asked a travel agent, on the first floor, whose door was open. She didn't know who did it. "It's just there." I asked a commissionaire on the ground floor. He didn't know.

When we left the building, to walk to the Union Station, both of us were angry.

I remembered the man in St Ives who lived down the road. A widower, in his late 70s. It was a hot summer's day. I was coming back from mailing some letters when he suggested I go for a drive in the country with him.

"You could use a break."

He had a Riley. He drove up the Stennack, turned left at the blacksmith's. And there was Rosewall Hill with the decaying engine-houses on the slope of moorland. He drove towards Towednack. Ahead were low outhouses, painted white, a piggery. And near them this tall brick chimney, neatly made, tapering as it went up. Then, at the very top, it became wider. As he drove near it, he turned his head and said, "I did that."

AFTER HENRY LEFT I tried to get on with some work, but I couldn't. I phoned the hospital. My mother was the same. As it was Sunday I decided to go for a walk. I walked north until I came to Roselawn. And saw fields on a residential street.

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They were Jewish cemeteries. On one side were the larger fields. Stones here had MDs and and PhDs after the names. There were several families called Kurtz. On one it had: "*His name will live for ever.*" But it was the two smaller cemeteries, on the other side of the street, that I was drawn to. On a wooden board, the paint fading, one had *Poland*. The other had *Minsk*.

I sat, on the side opposite, on a green park bench. Looked at these two small cemeteries. And thought. This is where she belongs.

I walked back from Roselawn. Down Forest Hill Road . . . down Oriole Boulevard . . . to St Clair. It had taken over an hour and as it was a warm day I sat on a bench in a small park on the corner of Avenue Road.

A few trees . . . green benches . . . I sat and smoked . . . when I noticed a sapling with a metal name-plate. I went over. *In Memory of My Beloved Papa Joseph Podobitko*. This was a good twenty-minute walk from the reservoir and the little park where I lived. What was Joseph Podobitko doing here?

I phoned Sarah.

"She has stopped talking", Sarah said. "She just points with a finger. And I'm supposed to know what she wants. When I get the wrong thing she just moves her head."

I talked to Selina.

"She's frightened of dying", Selina said. "You can see it in her eyes."

Next day I packed a white shirt, a dark tie, a suit, in case I had to stay for the funeral.

In her apartment. A feeling it's all coming to an end. The money was gone. I asked Sarah if she had taken it. She said she had.

After three days I had to return to Toronto. I went to the hospital to say goodbye. She looked thinner and smaller. But there was a youthful astonishment in her face. A luminous quality. The eyes looked very blue. She didn't have her teeth in. And the dark opening of her small mouth was in a smile.

This, I thought, is the way I want to remember her at the end. And I wanted it to end.

Weeks went by.

Selina phoned. "Why hold on to the apartment? It's paying rent for nothing."

"She needs to know she still has a place to go back to."

"She'll never go back there."

Two weeks later, Sarah phoned.

"You'll have to come and help me break it up."

"There's not much there", I said.

"I can't do it myself."

More weeks passed.

My mother started to get better. She started to take some food. Every time I now came to Ottawa another plant had died, something else was missing: the samovar, the pestle and mortar, the silver candlesticks, the silver tray, the silver coins. But she was getting stronger.

She was moved to a lower floor. They were going to try and build her up.

I dialled her number at the hospital.

"Hello", I said.

No answer.

"Hello."

"Hullo", she said, out of breath.

"How are you, Mother?"

"I'm fine", still out of breath. "Are you in Toronto?"

"No, I'm in Ottawa."

"In Ottawa . . . I just fell out of bed . . . to get to the phone. I'll have to call a nurse . . . I'm on the floor . . . we'll talk later."

WHEN I WENT to the hospital, I asked the staff nurse where her room was. She said she would take me.

"All the nurses are fighting to look after your mother."

I wondered why.

"Because she gets all the other patients involved. She includes them in whatever she says. And she doesn't talk about herself. She doesn't turn the talk to herself."

"A doctor came to see me", my mother said, after I sat down at the end of her bed. "He was the only one who said I was not dying. That I had something. That I hadn't given up.

"You know what I get from people—respect. Some people, whatever they have on their chest, they get it out. Dinka, if she had anything she tells it. I don't tell about my husband, my children, or any of my business. They tell all . . . .

"I wish I had done something in medicine. In research."

And I remember a visit. A knock on her door. A thin elderly woman stood with her arm in a makeshift sling. "I was told to come and see you. I fell. You would know what to do." My mother examined the woman's hand, tried to move the fingers. Then announced, "Call an ambulance".

"Look what she has to read." She pointed to the books of the woman in the bed beside her who was out of the room. "Trash. You can tell she is common.

"Sarah . . . doesn't have a head. You and me we have heads."

I tried to interrupt.

"I'm not finished", she said.

"There is a little Chinese lady. I take pity on her. She can't talk English. If I go, she goes. She talks Chinese. I talk Yiddish. She has a bowl of noodles. She gets her a fork. And me a fork. And she wants us to eat out of the same bowl. . . .

"A doctor who went away, on holiday, came back to see me. When he saw me he was crying. He was so pleased I was still alive.

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"Where are you going? You don't have to go out.

"The Chinese lady. She is a little thing. Hardly eats. But I show her this pudding with raisins is good . . . by eating it. So then she eats. She doesn't know a word of English . . . just Chinese. But she can't walk well . . . something is wrong with her feet.

"A Polish man came up to me and began to talk in Polish. So I answered him in Polish."

"How did he know?"

"A nurse told him I came from Poland."

"Afterwards she"—indicating the bed beside her "said, I see you have a boyfriend.

"She's *prost* . . . common.

"We walk with our walkers . . . . First the little Chinese . . . then me . . . then the Polish man . . . the nurses look at us. I tell them . . . this is a masquerade . . . a cabaret . . . . They don't know whether to laugh or not."

I looked at my watch.

"What is it like outside?"

"The leaves are falling. The sun is shining. I'm going back to Toronto."

"How is the apartment?"

"Fine. I've taken my books that you have in the bedroom in the drawers."

"Good. I don't want anyone to have them."

I got up to go.

"You'll phone me tomorrow?"

"Yes, When do you finish lunch?"

"About twelve, twelve-thirty."

"I'll phone you at one."

But it was she who phoned at nine.

"I just finished breakfast."

"What did you have?"

"Juice, an egg, toast. But I couldn't eat it all. Did you have a nice time?"

"Yes, now that you're better I don't mind being here."

"What will you do with the food left in the fridge?"

"I'll give it to Mrs Tessier."

"That's good."

"Your plants . . . ."

"My plans are to go back to the apartment. Will you go to the Château Laurier and get a bus to the airport?"

"No, I'll call a taxi and take a taxi to the airport."

"That's better."

"I'll write from Toronto."

FRED WAS the first to go. It was the end of October. A fine sunny morning. I was getting ready to take him out for what will be his last walk. He barks as he always does before he goes outside. From his bark you couldn't tell he has cancer that has spread. Fred looks up and wags his tail whenever I pat him. He is twelve and a half. It's a fine sunny day. The leaves on the ground are some of the colours of Fred, the browns. He has also white on his neck and some black on the sides, but mostly a light brown. I am waiting for the taxi to take us to the vet. Fred is sniffing the air. His head is up. His tail up and curling . . . .

The next to go was Mrs Tessier.

She died in her sleep. I read her obituary in *The Citizen*. Sometimes I would see her sitting in the all-glass connecting lounge, between the buildings, with a few other ladies who lived here. They all spoke French. She always looked jolly. Her feet not touching the ground. Her husband died a few years ago. A tall nervous man with glasses. He was also quiet. They had no children. Whenever I saw her she asked, "How is your mother?"

I would tell her.

"Will she come back?"

"I don't know."

And when I was to leave the apartment early next morning for Toronto, I would knock on her door the night before and give Mrs Tessier anything perishable in the fridge. I would knock on the door and a tallish thin woman with grey hair, in a fringe, opened it apprehensively. She looked sullen. She must have been, like Mrs Tessier, in her late 70s or early 80s. Then I saw Mrs Tessier appear to the right, sideways, wrapping a dressing-gown around her. She was naked underneath. And she was wrapping the dressing-gown around as if she didn't mind being seen like this. The other lady was fully dressed.

After that, whenever I knocked, the thin sullen woman was always there, always apprehensive. Once I saw her going to Mrs Tessier's door carrying cut flowers. Sometimes when I arrived, or was leaving, I heard light laughter from behind Mrs Tessier's door. I didn't know what was going on. But I hoped they were enjoying themselves.

THERE WAS GOING TO BE a meeting with the doctor and the social worker. Sarah, Selina, and my mother would be there to decide where she would go from the hospital. I had to be in Halifax on business.

When I got back to Toronto I phoned her.

"You sound better."

"Of course", she said. "I'm eating."

"How did the meeting go?"

"You should see how mad Selina was when the doctor said if I want to go home I can try it. Oh boy, was Selina mad. She wanted me to go to some nursing home, an old age home, to an institution. Anything but to live in my home again."

"How about Sarah?"

"She said nothing."

"How do you feel?"

"I'd like to try and see if I can look after myself."

"I'll come and take you back. When will that be?"

"Next Wednesday."

"I'll come on Tuesday."

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That night I spoke to Sarah on the phone. I asked about the meeting. "To get back to her place she put on some performance."

On Tuesday when I went to see her she was standing by the window with her walker, watching a blizzard.

"I'll need my boots. Put on the light in the hall. I have no light in the cupboard. But you will be able to feel, at the bottom, the boots. Take a scarf from inside a sleeve from one of my coats."

When I came back next day, after lunch, she was dressed ready to go in a wheelchair.

I gave her the green and brown silk scarf. Then the boots. She put one on with difficulty. Then tried the other. It wouldn't go. She tried again. Then I tried. It only went so far.

"You brought me two right feet", she said. "How can I go like this?"

"It's not far to walk", I said. "From the taxi, over a bit of snow, to the front door of your building. You have your walker. There will be the taxi-driver and me to hold you."

"Two right feet."

She thought that was very droll.

WITHOUT THE SAMOVAR, or the plants, the apartment looked empty.

"It's so nice", she said. "It lights my eyes up. I feel so good. It's home."

"The plants . . . ."

"It doesn't matter. This one is the healthiest. And this cutting from the rubber plant I think I can save."

She sat by the window looking at the snow-covered park. "Oh boy, Selina was mad. She wanted me to go to a nursing home. If I go to a nursing home I don't get any money from the government. This way I'll be able to leave some money to all the children.

"The sun is strong." She turned her head away from the window.

I phoned Selina at her office.

"She should be in a nursing home. I want my grandmother to live a few more years. And she will in a nursing home where they can look after her."

"She wants to be in her apartment."

"But what happens if anything goes wrong? Mummy is in Carleton Place. You are in Toronto. I'm the one who will have to look after her."

"She also said she wants to be back because of the monthly cheques."

"That's a cop-out. She doesn't want to lose her independence. That's what it's all about."

I phoned Sarah and asked if she would come and stay with Mother for a while.

"I'm too tired. The place is too small. Why? Did she want me to be there?"

"No. I just wondered if you thought of it."

I asked Mother, "What about having Sarah come and stay with you?"

"I don't think so. I feel better by myself."

It had rained during the night. Then it froze. On the train back to Toronto the smaller trees were bent over. Some were broken by the weight of the ice. But it all looked pretty. Mile after mile. I thought of a friend, a professor of mathematics at the University of Toronto. He has devoted his life to mathematics and to logic. I asked him what did he make of it all.

He said. "Nothing lasts. Everything changes."

Was this why we keep making connections? Why do I connect Gino's sculpture to that tall brick chimney to those saplings with Joseph Podobitko to Mr Thomas Sachs on the door of the hospital room to those little Jewish cemeteries on Roselawn?

But then, whenever I go to a new place and walk around to get to know it, I inevitably end up in a cemetery.

MY MOTHER had been in her apartment a half-year when I phoned to tell her I was going to England to see my daughters. I would be away several months.

"The children have to know that they have a father", she said.

I told her I would come tomorrow. "I'll see you around one-fifteen."

"Any time. You will be a good guest."

She had put on weight, and now could walk without a walker. But she still looked frail.

The place looked clean. The two surviving plants looked healthy. But without the samovar it seemed empty.

"Selina has it in the basement", she said. "What is a samovar doing in a basement?"

She wanted to make tea. And did, taking her time. I brought in the cups and saucers. She brought in the tea-pot.

"When I came home . . . everything was dirty—the dishes.

"Not any more the people who used to be—the apartments are empty."

She talked about Mrs Tessier.

"People in the building told me because I wasn't in my apartment Mrs Tessier couldn't go to sleep."

"How often do you go to the hospital?"

"Once every two weeks. When the doctor looks at me—the big smile. He is so happy. If I was in a nursing home I would be dead."

She left the table and disappeared into the bedroom. Came back with several twenty-dollar bills. Put them in my hands.

"For the children."

She sat down, slowly, by the table. "You know the money—I was saving for a trip to England."

We were silent.

"Only another seven years and you will get the old age pension. That's wonderful", she said. And began

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to take out her hearing aid. Then put it back in. "It should make a noise if it is working." I tried a new battery. It still wasn't working. She finally gave up and said she would get the nurse tomorrow to find out about it.

After that it was difficult to have a conversation. There were silences.

"Did you watch *Shoah* on television?"

She didn't answer. I didn't know if she heard.

"It's about European Jews being taken to concentration camps in Poland."

"No", she said quietly. "I watch *Guiding Light* and *The Young and the Restless*."

I must have looked puzzled.

"It's soap", she said, raising her voice.

I said nothing.

"It's soap opera", she said loudly.

And she was angry.

The Voice in Good Shape Too

While everything is still ahead of us,
it is so good just to look at you,
before deception and disappointment.
This glance
is neither the prelude to anything
nor is it yet a consequence:
it's so good to look at you like this,
without fear, without blame, without accusation.

As if the wind were lightly to stroke a pebble,
as if the water made waves of its own accord,
as if, as if. . . .

But we are not wind or water or pebbles.
We're tender, yes—or just weak?—and cruel.
Somehow we'll work out
how to spoil this
as-yet-we-do-not-know-what.

I pity you, lovely creature, you who bring
my cynical body out in goose-pimples—
this comical prospective cadaver,
this candidate for the dissecting-table.
(Not forgetting that, unfortunately,
your future prospects too are much the same.)

O nothing, it's just a woman!
(I say to myself).
And what is a woman?
Hair, skin, mucous membrane.
But why is it so just-there-and-exactly-as-it-should-be?

Dawn: I glance at the castle opposite,
a crumbling Secessionist building
(it's now a computer-stable).
Let there be silence:
the light's fleeing grace redeems
the sin of the bird-fouled plaster ornaments.

Then it all starts over again.

György Petri

Translated by Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri

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Peter Brimelow

The Maple Leaf For Ever?

A Short Guide to Canada

THE VIRTUALLY UNKNOWN Member of Parliament for Rocky Mountain in Alberta, Joe Clark, came to see me one winter afternoon in late 1975, at the Toronto offices of the *Financial Post*, Canada's main business newspaper, where I was then working. Clark was shortly to be nicknamed "Joe *Who*?" by the Canadian media, a joke originally made about Spiro Agnew after he was nominated for US Vice-President in 1968—and an example of how even minor American quirks evoke sedulous (albeit unadmitted) imitation north of the border.

Clark was a candidate for the leadership of the Progressive Conservative Party, nominally the most Right-wing of the three basically indistinguishable parties in Canada's federal Parliament. But almost no one had noticed. That autumn, he had broken a previous appointment with me, pleading insufficient time to consult his economic advisors. (Economics is a stigma you have to accept when you write for a paper called the *Financial Post*.) Somewhat reluctantly, I began our rescheduled interview by asking him what he thought about the quasi-official Economic Council of Canada's new report, *Looking Outward*, which recommended free trade with the US and had therefore been widely denounced as advocating Canada's annexation by the dreaded Yankees. Clark immediately fell apart. Frankly, he said, he didn't know anything about economics—still—and his exhausting schedule wasn't helping. "You see", he added, "when I went into politics I had to choose between learning economics and learning French. And I chose French . . . ."

I was completely disarmed. Still pondering how I could possibly write up the incident without humiliating such a nice and obviously harmless man, I went off to the Middle East to do a Special Report on the effects of the oil boom. The Report won a Canadian journalism award. Joe Clark won the Tory Leadership, and was subsequently to become Prime Minister of Canada.

Several morals can be extracted from this tale. One of them is the subtle but profoundly debilitating cost of the French connection to English Canadian public life. Politics is quite simply more important than economics in Canada, largely because of the opportunities for manipulation that this ethnic division offers to political entrepreneurs. Another is just how inexperienced Joe Clark was when he became Tory leader at the age of 36. For a practising politician to know nothing about what has historically been the central economic question facing his country may be less than surprising. (It is, though, mildly ironic in Clark's case because of the starring role he has more recently played as Foreign Minister in Brian Mulroney's government. Their efforts to reach a free trade agreement with the US were finally consummated after a federal election on the issue in 1988.) But to be unable to talk his way around such a question was a shocking breach of professional standards. Inexperienced leaders do surface in other countries (for example, President Jimmy Carter), but generally under unusual circumstances. In Canada they crop up with suspicious frequency—evidence, I believe, of profound structural flaws in Canada's institutions.

IN THE EARLY 1900s, Sir Wilfrid Laurier and others proclaimed that the 20th century would belong to Canada. Pierre Trudeau, more than 50 years later, held out the prospect of the country becoming "a brilliant prototype for the moulding of tomorrow's civilisation". But when I arrived in Canada in 1972, Canadians were reacting to such sentiments with quiet derision. And by the time Barry Bruce-Briggs and Marie-Josée Drouin were interviewing Canadian businessmen for one of Herman Kahn's Hudson Institute futurological surveys, they found their opening question so often volleyed right back at them in inverted form that only at the insistence of Kahn (a professional optimist) was the title of their book converted from a wry interrogative into an emphatic protestation: *Canada* ***Has*** *A Future*. . . .[1]

PETER BRIMELOW *is a senior editor of "Forbes Magazine" in New York and a columnist for the "Financial Post" in Canada and "The Times" in London. His most recent book is "The Patriot Game: Canada and the Canadian Question Revisited" (published by Key Porter, Toronto, in 1986 and by the Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, California, in 1987). He also contributed to "Friends So Different: Essays on Canada and the US in the 1980s" (University of Ottawa Press, 1989).*

[1] Marie-Josée Drouin and Barry Bruce-Briggs, *Canada* ***Has*** *A Future* (1978).

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Canada had of course been substantially spared the US recession of 1975-76, and Joe Clark's extraordinary admission came before the catastrophic recession of 1982-83—far deeper and longer in Canada than in the US—which so shook the country's political and business élites that they finally began to contemplate the free trade option. More immediately, it took place before the prolonged crisis over possible secession of the French-speaking province of Quebec that began when the separatist *Parti Quebécois* won the provincial election of 1976.

THE CANADIAN CONUNDRUM is not just a matter of restive regions. More light is thrown upon it by asking a simple question: why is Canada poorer than the US? From Walter Gordon's Royal Commission in 1957 to comments in 1985 by Simon Reisman, Canada's negotiator in the recent free trade talks, semi-official estimates have placed Canada's standard-of-living at as low as 70% of the American level. Canadians seem to accept this, in their stoical way, as a sort of law of nature. But it isn't.

Canada's natural resources base is at least as good, particularly per capita, as that of the US; its people are conveniently concentrated in a few large cities; and the climate they face is little more severe than the northern tier of US states—"the Frost Belt". There is no disadvantage inherent in Canada's fundamental economic position that suitable policies, like free trade, could not correct. Moreover, Canada's population is homogeneous, without the Americans' intractable underclass problem, and Canada spends practically nothing on Defence, preferring to free-load on the American effort. Without these serious financial burdens, its living standard should actually be higher than that of its larger neighbour.

Canada could be a second Switzerland (which is also, after all, a rather cold place). It should be an oasis of prosperity and civilisation: what Ronald Reagan used to call "a city on a hill". But instead it more closely resembles sluggish, querulous, post-War Britain. It has even developed disturbing fiscal parallels with countries like Argentina and Uruguay, which at the beginning of the century stood with Canada on the threshold of development, only to diverge from it and decay into ignominious Third World status. (It now seems clear, for instance, that Canada has missed the chance to develop its high-cost energy resources in the High Arctic that was offered by the OPEC cartel's price hikes. This was entirely due to Ottawa's mismanagement; the price, however, will be paid mainly by Western Canada.)

This Canadian failure is, of course, not really a tragedy. Far worse things have happened to other successor states of the British Empire. Even in purely economic terms, Canada's record has been passable by world standards. The real disappointment is in comparison to what might have been. The fundamental reason for this chronic underperformance is that, to appropriate the famous phrase used by Professor (now Senator) Daniel Patrick Moynihan to explain the failure of American black families to work their way into the middle class, Canadian politics is embroiled in "a tangle of pathologies".

I will attempt to unravel the skein.

ALTHOUGH THE SMALL Canadian Studies industry in American universities and elsewhere rarely asks itself why Canada does not do better, it does sometimes approach the issue in a more tactful way—as befits a discipline that is pervasively beholden to Ottawa for financial support. Attention is drawn to the various differences between US and Canadian economic forms: the relatively greater share of Gross National Product taken by provincial governments in Canada; the existence of a "public enterprise tradition"; the much larger intra-regional transfer payments; the higher savings rate. These factors are often described as constituting the economic dimension of a unique Canadian "political culture".[2] In fact, Canada underperforms largely because of these differences in policy.

By contrast, the Canadian Question posed here is in the tradition of Goldwin Smith—Canada's pre-eminent Victorian intellectual, a British immigrant, former Regius Professor at Oxford, and a classical liberal like his fellow-Etonian William Ewart Gladstone. Smith's classic *Canada and the Canadian Question* appeared in 1891.[3] Any talk of a unique Canadian culture, economic or otherwise, inspired him to derision. "The two sections of the English-speaking race on the American continent", he pointed out, ". . . are in a state of economic, intellectual and social fusion, daily becoming more complete." Indeed, Smith's Canadian Question was whether Canada could—or should—survive at all.

These views have made Goldwin Smith something of an unperson among Canadian intellectuals heavily influenced since the 1960s by a form of "Canadian Nationalism" that is basically a local variant of international Left-wing and anti-American attitudes. But although the verdict may not yet be in on his prediction that Canada will ultimately join with the United States, he certainly appears to have been highly prescient in other areas, notably in his contention that the French of Quebec would never assimilate and would always present Canada with a political problem. Above all, his answer to the problem of Canada's persistent underperformance, arising from his classical liberal assumptions, remains strikingly valid today: "'Rich By Nature, Poor By Policy' might be written over Canada's door."

ONE OF Winston Churchill's methods of running Britain at war was periodically to demand from his cowering subordinates an account of what was happening in some area or another, "on one half of a sheet of notepaper". He found that this concentrated their minds on essentials. Despite Smith's precedent, my own analysis of Canada may seem unfamiliar, disorienting, and even fantastic to those accustomed to the more comforting conventional view. So my essential argument is compressed into a handy outline guide.

[2] See, for example, Herschel Hardin, *A Nation Unaware: The Canadian Economic Culture* (1974).

[3] Ninety-five years later, I subtitled my own book on Canada in homage to it.

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1. CANADA—TO paraphrase Metternich—is merely a geographical expression. For historical reasons, Canada has acquired the legal form of a nation-state, but it is not a nation. Culturally and even spatially, its Anglophone and Francophone communities are growing more separate each year. There are around six million Francophones,[4] about a quarter of Canada's population. All but some half-million live in the province of Quebec, which they totally control. This physical separation of Anglophone and Francophone is becoming steadily more acute. The number of Francophones living outside Quebec and the number of Anglophones inside Quebec are falling not merely in proportional but in absolute terms.

Official defenders of Canada's current order have developed two techniques to finesse this embarrassing reality. Firstly, they assert in the face of all evidence to the contrary that the oil and water of French and English have indeed mixed—". . . there is really no discontinuity between them, they can be seen as a single entity", as Pierre Trudeau brazenly assured a banquet in honour of Queen Elizabeth II's visit to Canada in 1976.

Secondly, they talk of "Canada" while ignoring Quebec altogether. A fine example of this was the essay "Signing Away Canada's Soul: Culture, Identity and the Free Trade Movement", published in the January 1989 issue of *Harper's* Magazine by Robertson Davies, perhaps Canada's most eminent novelist. Davies's omission of Quebec was particularly inappropriate because the Quebec élite were solidly in favour of free trade, viewing the idea of a distinctive Canadian Anglophone culture with incredulity; and the province's vote had tipped the balance in the 1988 election.

Goldwin Smith was aware of both tricks, as he showed in discussing a precursor of "Canadian Nationalism", the "Canada First" movement of the 1870s:

> "Enthusiasm was blind to the difficulty presented to the devotees of Canadian nationality by the separate nationality of Quebec, or if it was not blind, succeeded in cajoling itself by poetic talk about the value of French gifts and grace as ingredients for combination, without asking itself whether fusion was not the thing the French most abhorred."

2. THERE ARE at least two and conceivably seven incipient nations within Canada. By far the most important division is that between English and French Canada. But there are lesser distinctions within English Canada: Ontario; the West (with or without the sub-section of British Columbia, beyond the Rockies); the Maritime provinces on the Eastern seaboard (with or without the sub-section of Newfoundland, formerly a separate British colony); and the native-dominated North. These areas differ economically and culturally in significant respects, often echoing similar sectionalisms to those noted south of the border in the US. All these divisions constitute political fault-lines underlying the Canadian polity.

Sheer size poses a more serious political problem for Canada than is generally recognised. Human communities are centrifugal in tendency, and it has been the exception rather than the rule for the great overseas possessions of the European imperial powers to retain political unity after independence. Spanish America, only a million square miles or so larger than Canada's 3.6 million, has fragmented into fifteen different countries; and even the proverbially lucky Australians suffered a crisis in the 1930s, when Western Australia voted to secede. A similar torsion is continuously if quietly at work in Canadian politics.

3. WITHIN THE Canadian framework Quebec is emerging as a genuine nation-state. History does not move in straight lines. There is a cyclical rhythm to Francophone nationalism, as well as a rising long-run secular trend. Every downturn is greeted with renewed complacency in English Canada. But the ratchet-wheel of Francophone power never goes into reverse. The last quarter-century of turmoil has left the Francophones in complete institutional control of Quebec, which is now regarded by all segments of French opinion as their political expression.

This amounts to a repudiation of the life-work of Pierre Trudeau, former Prime Minister and leader of the federal Liberal Party from 1968-84. Trudeau was a Quebec Francophone, but he was also a man of the Left and deeply suspicious of Quebec nationalism, apparently because of his experiences with the reactionary Quebec governments of his youth. Trudeau imposed radical reforms on Canada with the intention of institutionalising a bilingual, bicultural society precisely in order that the *Québecois* should view Canada as a whole, rather than Quebec, as their political expression.

His reforms can now be seen to have failed utterly. When Prime Minister Brian Mulroney concluded the so-called "Meech Lake Accord" with the provinces in 1987, he supposedly ended the round of constitutional negotiations begun in the effort to keep Quebec from voting for the *Parti Québecois*'s proposal in the 1980 referendum, which sought a mandate to negotiate "sovereignty in association". Mulroney accepted this failure by formally recognising Quebec as "a distinct society", with a special responsibility for Francophones. English Canada, however, is still supposed to bear the very substantial cost of the Trudeau-era institutions.

In Ottawa jargon, the *"deux nations"* concept of Canada has triumphed posthumously over the view of Quebec as *"une province comme les autres"*. From retirement, Pierre Trudeau has, not surprisingly, denounced the Meech Lake Accord as representing a "fast track" to Quebec's separation. The Accord, which has several other aspects, will expire if it is not ratified by all the provinces—supposedly in 1990, although Ottawa has recently been shuffling its feet on this point. Several provinces are holding out against it, citing

[4] Ottawa's official jargon has now generally replaced the terms "French" and "English". There are also "Endophones" (previously known as Indians and Eskimos, and sometimes now as "native peoples") and "Allophones" (immigrants who speak neither English nor French). This can fuzz Canadian language statistics. Most Allophones eventually become Anglophones, so that this term (like the American "Anglo") now covers many people not of British origin, although about half of all Canadians still are.

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various reasons. To some extent, Meech Lake has become a lightning-rod for discontent with Brian Mulroney's government (currently running third in the political opinion polls), and with Canada's current order in general.

As if the revival of Quebec separatism wasn't enough, the Reform Party, a genuinely Right-wing group with particularist if not separatist leanings, has recently begun winning elections in Western Canada, the vast area stretching from beyond the Great Lakes to the Pacific, where discontent with Canada's Quebec-focused politics is coming to the boil. And there are only ten years of the 20th century to go.

This discontent was violently exacerbated by the latest jerk of the Quebec ratchet. After years of litigation, the Supreme Court of Canada finally struck down some of the legislation initiated by the *Parti Québecois*, which, as part of its campaign to make the province a unilingual French society, was moving to suppress the public use of English in Quebec. That province's Liberal government (the Liberals succeeded the *Parti Québecois* after the failure of the 1980 referendum) promptly used powers acquired during the constitutional negotiations to over-ride the Supreme Court's decision. In the curious way that these things happen, this move seems to have finally brought home to many English Canadians the obvious truth that Quebec is simply not playing the bi-national game, that its entire political élite is crypto-separatist.

After the 1988 Quebec provincial election, in which a revived *Parti Québecois* put on a strong performance, Quebec's Liberal Premier, Robert Bourassa, said publicly that remaining in Canada was not Quebec's only "external option". If the Meech Lake Accord was not ratified, he implied, this would produce a separatist convulsion in Quebec. If the Accord is ratified, however, Quebec will acquire further powers to continue its slow secession. . . . From English Canada's point of view, there is a high road and a low road, but they both lead to the same place.

4.

ANGLOPHONE CANADA is essentially part of a larger English-speaking North American national culture. Despite frequent assertions to the contrary, English Canada's political, economic and social culture differs from that of the US only in degree, not in kind. It forms a distinct section, like the American South or (probably the closest comparison) Pacific North-west, with its own flavour and nuances but nevertheless sharing a common culture. However, the Canadian Studies industry and conventional wisdom throughout Canada (a considerable force) maintain that Canada has its own "culture" which is quite different from that of the US, despite superficial similarities.[5] The effect of differing policies and institutions is usually ignored.

Attempts have even been made to demonstrate this empirically, through polling data, which typically aggregate French and English Canadian responses, blurring their systemic differences. Similarly, US data such as crime rates are often used for the purposes of demonstrating differences between the two nations, without any allowance for the heterogeneous elements of US society, some of which are responsible for wholly disproportionate amounts of crime. Significantly, Seymour Martin Lipset, whose polling work has been much cited in this context, has recently refined his position to take account of the English-French dichotomy: "The evidence indicates that Francophone Canadians vary more from their Anglophone conationals than the latter do from Americans."[6]

A true comparison would be between the core English-speaking populations of the two nations, allowing for sectional location—and with wholly foreign cultures, such as those of Italy or India. Like the famous half-full or half-empty glass of water, the question of whether the US and Canada are fundamentally alike is vitally affected by perspective. But Canadian Anglophone intellectuals are usually fairly ignorant of international comparisons. And a good few simply want to break the glass.

Of course, culture does matter—it does affect economic forms, and often in astonishingly pervasive fashion, as Thomas Sowell has demonstrated in his studies of ethnic groups in the US and elsewhere.[7] Alain Peyrefitte, for example, in his study of the economic culture of France, specifically singled out the Quebec Francophones' lack of success as a transatlantic expression of *le mal français*: "Their troubles stem less from law or politics than from [their own] attitudes."[8] And in 1973, the historian of the Prudential Insurance Company of Newark, New Jersey, noted with bafflement the extraordinary reluctance of Francophone workers to accept transfers out of their community, even when they could easily have commuted to a new job from their present homes.[9] However, it is between the Francophones and Anglophones of North America, whether Canadian or American, that the real cultural divide occurs.

In 1982 Pierre Trudeau scheduled three televised Prime Ministerial "fireside chats" on the subject of Canada's economy. He appeared at 7.30 p.m. in Central Canada, Quebec, and Ontario, which of course meant a rush-hour 5.30 in Alberta and an impossible workday afternoon 4.30 in British Columbia. But then, Trudeau was always famously insensitive to the West—one historian of the Liberal Party has even claimed that when Trudeau became Prime Minister he had never been west of Toronto. On this occasion, though, there was an excuse: a later scheduling would have put Trudeau in conflict with baseball's World Series on the American border TV stations. In such moments of truth, Canadian politicians have no doubts about the cultural identity of their flock.

5.

CANADA'S POLITICAL SYSTEM is badly designed, and seriously misrepresents Canadian reality. The most important flaw is the lack of effective regional balance, which has allowed interest groups in the central

[5] A popular statement of this view is found in Pierre A. Berton, *Why We Act Like Canadians* (1982).

[6] Seymour Martin Lipset, "The Cultural Dimension", in Charles Doran and John H. Sigler (eds), *Canada and the United States: Enduring Friendship, Persistent Stress* (1985).

[7] Thomas Sowell, *The Economics and Politics of Race* (1983).

[8] Alain Peyrefitte, *The Trouble With France* (1981).

[9] W. N. A. Carr, *From Three Cents a Week: The Story of the Prudential Insurance Company* (1975).

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Canadian provinces of Quebec and Ontario to dominate the Confederation. But specific institutional factors are responsible for many Canadian political characteristics which are conventionally attributed to Canada's unique (i.e., "un-American") political culture.

For practical purposes, Canada at a national level is a unitary state. Contemplate the fact that, if the US had had Canada's political institutions in the Presidential election years of 1984 and 1988, the American Prime Minister would have been Representative Jim Wright (Democrat: Texas). In 1980, furthermore, the Prime Minister would have been Tip O'Neil. Wright and O'Neil were leaders of the Party that won a majority in the US House of Representatives, which, like the Canadian House of Commons, is composed of equal-sized, single-member districts elected on the first-past-the-post system. Both legislatures take account solely of population, and the cities of the East (in Canada's case, Quebec and Ontario) therefore outweigh the vast spaces of the West.

The American founding fathers were keenly aware of the danger of domination by a majority region, and tried to counter it by creating the Senate, to which each state elects two members regardless of population. American federalism is not merely a question of glorified local government: it actually allows the regions to project power in the federal capital. By contrast, Canadian federalism has powerful provinces, but the Canadian Senate is appointive and has become moribund. There is no effective recognition at federal level of Canada's discrete regional communities, and the interests of specific regions are consistently overlooked, where they are not actually abused.

Thus the National Energy Programme imposed by the federal Liberals in 1981 aborted Western Canada's energy boom. And the fishing industry's low priority in Ottawa, reflected in Canada's slowness to proclaim a 200-mile territorial limit, has resulted in its atrophy. The descent into welfare dependency of the island province of Newfoundland (which entered Confederation only in 1949) is in stark contrast to the economic success of the very similarly situated island of Iceland (which after World War II chose not to renew its continental links with Denmark).

6. THE POLITICAL SYSTEM and Canada's deep divisions, particularly its linguistic disjunctions, have facilitated the growth of an unusually powerful public class. This élite, an unusually healthy specimen of what Irving Kristol has called "the New Class", mediates across Canada's various divisions, and invents policies that advantage itself and its clients.

The study of Canada has been greatly benefited by the development of the "Public Choice" school of economics, for which Professor James Buchanan of George Mason University was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1986. Basically, Public Choice analyses government activity in terms of the economic interests of the respective actors, instead of assuming that policies are necessarily conceived and implemented "in the public interest". Professor Gordon Tullock of the University of Arizona has identified the particularly valuable concept of "rent-seeking"—the use of political power to extract benefits from the economic process.

The political economy of Canada can be summarised simply, if crudely. A Central Canadian élite, extracting "rents" from a rich, resource-based economy, struggles to quieten peripheral protest in three distinctive ways: by coercion—voting down regional opposition in Parliament, as with the National Energy Programme; by bribery—extensive inter-regional transfer payments, under such rubrics as "Welfare" or "Economic Development" (because of the opportunity cost of other Ottawa policies, of course, this amounts to bribing the regions with their own money); and by conning—persuading the regions of the legitimacy of the rent-seeking activity.

ALTHOUGH justified as a "nationalist" measure aimed at foreign (mainly US) oil companies, the NEP is an outstanding example of this phenomenon. It effectively expropriated the windfall profits which accrued to Western Canada's hydrocarbon resources during the "Energy Crisis", concentrating them in Ottawa's hands and redirecting them to clients like Central Canadian consumers, who benefited from energy prices held below world levels. Historically, perhaps the most notorious rent-seeking policy was Canada's long-standing protectionism, which benefited Quebec and Ontario manufacturers at the expense of economic activity in the periphery. A more modern example is "multiculturalism"—a range of government policies, ostensibly designed to help immigrant groups maintain their heritage, which actually legitimises the stimulation and purchase of professional ethnic leaders and their constituencies with tax dollars. Canadians are frequently informed that "multiculturalism" is an expression of their unique political culture. But it is in fact quite new—and has cropped up at about the same time in the US and throughout the English-speaking world.

In terms of post-Trudeau Canada, the most remarkable Public Choice phenomenon is the imposition of official bilingualism upon the federal Civil Service, and as far as possible throughout the whole of public life. Its practical effect is to mandate the preferment of bilingual personnel. Since Canada is not remotely bilingual or bicultural, this amounts to a supreme act of social engineering which materially benefits the 16% of Canada's population—two-thirds of them Francophones, and almost all Central Canadians—who can speak both languages.

Unilinguals are second-class citizens in Canada. Only bilinguals, for example, can hope for full careers in the Civil Service—and Canada is a country with pervasive government on the European social-democratic model. Official bilingualism also significantly enhances the power of the quite atypical segments of Canadian society from which the bilinguals tend to be drawn—the Francophones; the Anglophone remnant in the Quebec metropolis of Montreal; the established (and hence educated) upper middle classes; and Central Canada in general. Not coincidentally, the position of all of these groups turns out to be otherwise threatened by demographic trends. The proportion of Francophones in the population is falling, and may be as low as 20% by the end of the century; while the burgeoning of Western

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Canada is upstaging all aspects of the Central Canadian Establishment.

In the political arena, the perceived need to have a French-speaking leader has seriously reduced the options open to the essentially-Anglophone Progressive Conservative Party. Bilingualism was the principal (and arguably the only) asset of Brian Mulroney, who had never held office or indeed fought an election until he became Tory leader, displacing Joe Clark, in 1983. Indeed, Canada's current political order is so focused on Quebec that it appears that any potential Prime Minister must be bilingual and hail from that province, preferably from those rare circumstances where the two societies—the Francophone and the Anglophone—have interacted to the point where he can "pass" as a member of either. Supply of such cultural hermaphrodites is limited—but Mulroney and Trudeau, accentless in both languages, are examples.

Official bilingualism has its comic aspects. The spectacle of signs and announcements zealously duplicated in French in Western Canadian airports, although no one in the teeming crowds understands the language, is reminiscent of those bowls of milk which Irish peasants used to leave on the doorstep to placate the phantom nation of Little People with whom they believed they shared their land. But in Canada the policy has committed Ottawa to a course that will increasingly collide with the political culture of English-speaking North America, with its minimal class distinctions, high social mobility, and determination of status by private activity rather than public prescription.

The typical American political career begins in mid-life—witness Jimmy Carter or Ronald Reagan. Anglophone Canadians will be unable to replicate this, unless they are atypical *apparatchiks* like Joe Clark, who has spent virtually his entire adult life in various political jobs, and has in effect been coopted into the Ottawa milieu. Conversely, the fact that the federal Civil Service is the only part of Canadian society which remotely approaches the bilingual and bicultural ideal accentuates its isolation and its distinct tendency to believe, like the Prussian Army, that it is the supreme repository of national values.

7. The Canadian public class has developed what Marxists call a "dominant ideology" which rationalises and justifies its own power. It has been quite successful in imposing this ideology as the Canadian conventional wisdom. Basically amounting to the direct opposite of everything I have asserted, the ideology has historically been identified with the federal Liberal Party. But Brian Mulroney has made a determined effort to hijack it, rather as the British "Butskellites" or the American liberal Republican practitioners of "Me-Tooism" did in the 1950s. One of its important radical mutations is Canadian Nationalism.

In political terms, the Liberal ideology has functioned as a dominant ideology in the sense defined by Antonio Gramsci. By establishing its hegemony, it has served to legitimise Ottawa's policies and to suppress challenges to them. Official bilingualism, for example, has been effectively kept out of politics by a consensus among the major parties

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that to question the issue in public would quite simply be immoral. Richard Gwyn, formerly the distinguished Ottawa correspondent of the *Toronto Star*, and a supporter of the policy, has admitted this frankly in his biography of Trudeau:

> "Bilingualism, in truth, was nothing less than a social revolution. Like the introduction of the welfare state, like the counter-cultural revolution of the 1960s, it was a development that effected fundamental change in the character of the country. But in contrast to those transformational phenomena, no one in authority in Ottawa in the late 1960s and early 1970s let on that massive change was about to happen."[10]

Similarly, the Progressive Conservatives have been deterred from the obvious electoral strategy of uniting their natural Anglophone supporters while writing off the Francophones—a clear route to victory, since the Anglophones constitute 75% of the population. Instead, they have persisted in playing down Anglophone concerns in an attempt to break into the Francophone stronghold of Quebec. Brian Mulroney has explicitly shied away from radical reform on the Reagan or Thatcher models because of the belief that Canada is somehow "different".

8. CANADIAN POLITICS is deceptively volatile. The present political order is not particularly secure. Although for long influential in Canada, the Liberal ideology only finally established its hegemony in the 1960s. The full effects of Trudeau's transformation of Canada's institutions have not yet been felt, and may well prove to be merely a transitional phase.

The most obvious symptom of volatility, of course, has been rumblings and grumblings along regional fault-lines, not merely in Quebec but in Western Canada. Political scientists have also found it significant that—exceptionally among countries with a similar electoral system—Canada has never evolved an unequivocal two-party system at the federal level. Instead, there have been repeated third- (and even fourth-) party insurrections. Further evidence of ferment shows in the sudden triumph of bilateral free trade with the US. Despite its inherent logic, free trade was so contrary to the conventional wisdom as late as 1983 that in the Tory leadership race of that year Brian Mulroney denounced the very idea, and fiercely attacked a rival who dared to raise the matter.

Quebec has always been the obvious flashpoint of Canadian politics, but in future the West may be a candidate. The reason is demographic. In 1901, the four Western provinces constituted only about 10% of Canada's population; in the East, Ontario had 40%, Quebec 30%, and the Maritimes 20%. But by 1981, the West had risen to claim 27% of the population, for the first time exceeding Quebec, which was left with 26%. Ontario had just under 37%, and the Maritimes passed into insignificance, with only 10%.

Canadian politics, then, is becoming a three-actor system. Previously, Ontario and Quebec between them could dominate Canada. Increasingly, it will be possible for either to break away and govern Canada in alliance with the West. Indeed, this new system was already visible in the 1988 election. Ontario, as represented by its provincial government and by much of the Toronto media élite, opposed free trade. But the Quebec élite—once again showing its independence—and the West did not. This proved decisive. At some point in the future, the booming West may be able to force through fundamental institutional change.

The story of Canada contains a number of themes common in the latter half of the 20th century. There is the intractability of nationalism, as evidenced in Quebec's steady rise to sovereign status. There is the rise of "the New Class" as a powerful interest group, with its apparent ability to create facts (such as an official Canada that is more or less bilingual), and the ultimate failure of this sort of social engineering to overcome intractable reality.

Finally, there is that peculiar malaise which has overcome other parts of the English-speaking world: the conviction that the only legitimate expression of its identity lies in subordinating itself to others. . . .

[10] Richard Gwyn, *The Northern Magus: Pierre Trudeau and the Canadians* (1981).

A Pastoral Escapist's Valediction

But it would be very damp, you said:
Yes it would, on an excessively green
Slope of Devon clay, with the thatch
Rain-black, the low-browned sun-denying
Windows and that crooked orchard
Closing in.
What did we really fear—
That settled here we would live out
A hollow pastoral, unable to keep
Erect among its bent labouring ghosts?
Too sentimental: all that mattered was,
It was just our turn, for a brief stay,
To walk consciously where they plodded
On the rural roundabout, apt to break back
Or heart if you try to wrest from it
More than it can give: a daffodil slope
Hurts the heart with desiring too much
Merely of things that grow in the soil:
The blue-flashing machine is at the gate—
It was never, you knew, a complete retreat.

Michael Thorpe

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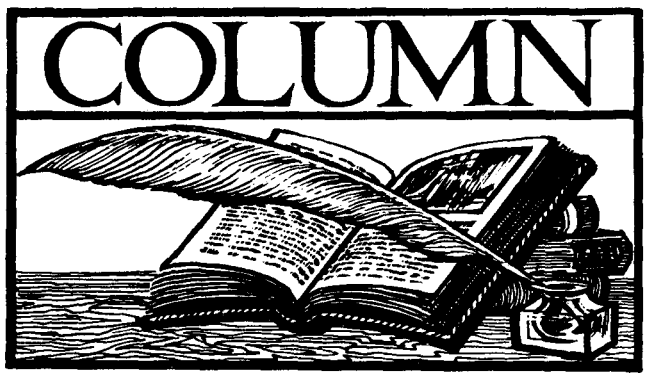

PARACHUTING, for all but experts, is a scary business. It has two bad moments and one good. The worst is stepping into space and a brief, wild, panicky free fall. The good moment is the jerk on the harness, followed by amazing peace, floating down in near-silence. But that doesn't last. As you try to steer, heaving away from hazards like trees, water, or power-lines, the ground comes up with a rush. You weren't floating: you were being hurled towards it. Landing is hard and sudden, the second bad moment, especially if there's much wind. A roll and a scramble, dragged along by the canopy until you master it, fighting with silk ectoplasm that has a life of its own.

Europe and the Alliance have been in free fall lately. For what now seems a past age, we droned along in a mental fuselage: deterrence, détente, Western Europe uniting, Atlantic partnership, Star Wars, East-West negotiations—there might be turbulence, but we knew our familiar surroundings, the walls, ribs, and rivets of the plane. Even the Berlin Wall, a Russian once told me, was a factor for peace. "It gives us stability", he claimed. And a senior German diplomat used a wall metaphor to describe NATO. "We need", he said, "a wall behind us that has no crick in it." He was not alluding to George Orwell's biographer. He meant "crack".

Then, abruptly, those solid certainties slid open. Beneath our feet was a void of rushing wind and night air. At our side, the dispatcher was waiting to clap us on the shoulder. In a gasping moment, heels together, arms close, head erect, we dropped.

As I write, we're still falling, tossing and tumbling, all landmarks lost. It's happening so fast that plans and predictions look silly as soon as they're made. But there may just be a case for trying to map the terrain below us, with a few scenarios of where we might land.

1. The end of the Alliance?

This has been mooted by some observers, and may lie at the back of Mikhail Gorbachov's mind. The Alliance was formed, they point out, to meet a specific danger at a specific time, after the coup in Czechoslovakia and the blockade of Berlin. If the fear of a Soviet attack in Europe is no longer felt or justified, what becomes of NATO's preparedness? All those manoeuvres in Germany—where now is the Redland they were practising against?

Five points seem worth making here. The most obvious is that nobody knows whether Mr Gorbachov might not be ousted by some grim-faced, grey-hearted member of the old guard. That alone will certainly dictate caution. Secondly, for reasons of geography that even Wegener's "continental drift" seems unlikely to remedy, Europeans will never see East and West as symmetrical. The USA is 3,000 miles away; the USSR is close. Modern technology, it's true, can reduce distances: but it still takes time to move troops. If the Alliance ended, or the USA withdrew all Americans in uniform from Europe, however peaceful relations might be with the USSR, Europeans would feel dangerously exposed. Nor is asymmetry merely geographical. For the present, at least, the respective defence systems mismatch each other: the West relies far more heavily on missile systems, whereas the East is better supplied with conventional hardware and manpower.

Thirdly, while the old perceived threat of Soviet aggression may have faded, it would be rash to assume that all danger of armed conflict in Europe has disappeared. Not all wars are superpower wars; and in some circumstances, as in 1914, small wars can become big. Nor, fourthly, is Europe the only or the most likely scene of potential violence. It remains conceivable that developments elsewhere—in the Middle East, and perhaps in the Far East—could threaten Western interests to such a degree as to need a collective Western *démarche*, if not collective intervention. It might even come about that some form of dangerous adventurism—perhaps on the part of China, perhaps by Libya, perhaps from militant fundamentalist Islam, perhaps even within Europe—could call for a collective stand by *both* the West *and* the Soviet Union. In that, Americans and Europeans would undoubtedly feel more comfortable if still united in the Alliance.

Finally, crystal-gazing even more rashly, let us suppose that in some future world, better organised to keep pace with technology and global dangers, there might be created the "world police force" or peace-keeping unit that naive idealists prattled of during and shortly after World War II. In that case, too, it would surely be wasteful to dissolve an existing alliance of 16 nations, which could be used as a building-block for a world-wide "peace corps" whose role would not always be military.

2. Slowing down the European Community?

Hardened Community-watchers may smile at that phrase. Slow it down still further, they might argue, and the European Community would go into reverse. That, in fact, has always been the contention of ardent "Europeans", who see it as a bicycle which would fall over if it stopped.

Some degree of deceleration does seem inevitable, whether we like it or not. The "1992" operation—"Europe without Frontiers" by the end of that year—has lost some of its glamour now that Europe's most notorious frontier, the Berlin Wall, is being physically demolished. Freer trade in consumer durables looks pretty tame compared with freedom for people so long oppressed.

Technically, too, the old timetable looks like last year's edition. A brisk dash to 1992, quicker moves to economic and monetary union, revision of the EC Treaties to bring more efficiency and democracy: that was the plan. Till then,

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postpone consideration of other bids for membership—from Turkey, from Austria. Keep the candidates talking until the Community was united enough to take them on in its stride.

In some ways, that still seems sensible. As Kingsley Amis memorably said of education, "More will mean worse"; and Turkey's demography and human-rights record understandably give Europeans pause. But events are overtaking sensible attitudes. Whether or not the newly de-Communised States of Eastern Europe actually apply for EC membership or association, they will need urgent attention; and if the Community can't supply it, others will. The others already include the United States: they might include member States of the Community, acting unilaterally. To forestall that, there must be collective attention and action. Nor can the Community do everything at once. So time and perhaps resources may well be diverted eastwards, inevitably shifting the emphasis from internal development. If, as remains possible, Czechoslovakia or Hungary or any other de-Communised State were to apply for EC membership or association, it would be hard for the Community to say, in effect, "Wait till we've grown more united ourselves". And if the Community finds it hard to say that to Austria's northern and eastern neighbours, how can it go on saying it to Austria herself?

Some people of course read "More will mean worse" as "More will mean better"—i.e. less united. They would probably welcome the prospect of a Community enlarged to include the whole of Europe outside Russia: "a real Europe at last"—"Pan-Europe"—"the impossible dream". Impossible it certainly is, for the time being. The existing Twelve find 1992 a tough enough deadline: imagine the task of exposing newly de-Communised States, poor, inefficient, inflationary, ill-equipped for free enterprise, to all the rigours of the EC Treaties—free movement of goods, services, people, and money; anti-trust regulations; common policies for transport, agriculture, and foreign trade. Imagine, too, the burden for the existing Community. Long, guided, and aided transition arrangements would have to be made. That alone would further distract the Community from its current internal purposes. And the end-product, however distant in time, could hardly be the tightly-knit, effective, and agile economic and political entity that any "Europe" must be if it wants to keep up with the Joneses, the Jonesskis, and Jones-San. A Pan-European Community would be a flabby, shuffling, pathetic case of voluble elephantiasis. Perhaps that's the future that opponents of what they call "federalism" secretly want.

3. A free-floating Germany?

Germany, of course, lies at the heart of most of these problems, as she lies at the heart of Europe. One of the European Community's original aims was to reconcile France and Germany after World War II. Another was to embrace the new democratised Federal Republic as an equal in a system of collective action based on democratic institutions and equitable rules, so as to encourage free and peaceful development and discourage nationalism and *revanchisme*. Only in such a context, it was felt, could Germany's neighbours be reassured.

This was not a matter of Germans' supposed "national character". In the West at least, two new generations of Germans have lived down the crimes of their grandparents' leaders. In the East, they still seem to arouse uneasy, atavistic feelings; but even there the appalling past is 45 years away. So perhaps we can forget Coleridge's remark, in his *Table Talk*, that "There is a nimiety, a too-muchness, in all Germans". The real question is whether there is a too-muchness in Germany's size.

Even the Federal Republic bulks very large in the Community of the Twelve. One of the major arguments for establishing genuine monetary union, with a European Central Bank, is to prevent the monetary policies of the other member States being in effect determined, or even unduly influenced, by that of Germany. In civilian terms, this resembles the argument for establishing a European Army in the 1950s—to contain, and sublimate, resurgent German strength within a collective effort. Those who remember that controversy will recall that Left-wing opponents of the European Defence Community alleged that it would mean "German rearmament". What they got, when the project was defeated, was still German rearmament, but in the much looser framework of Western European Union. Right-wing opponents of a European Central Bank fear domination by foreigners: some even identify Germany as likely to run the show. This is to misjudge the structure of any such Bank. More important, it misjudges the preponderance in Europe that the *Bundesbank* already has.

If the existing Community, even now, has difficulty taming and harnessing the energies of the existing West Germany, how much bigger a problem will arise in the long run when Germany is reunified within the Community. "Will", "in the long run", and "within the Community" are the operative words.

Some politicians in recent weeks were still talking as if German reunification, to which so many have so long paid lip-service, were something that could be either delayed or fudged. Delay, in our present free fall, is no longer an option. With 2,000 people a day leaving East Germany for the West, both sides have an urgent interest in speed. And fudging—or confederation—which until even recently seemed a possibility, is probably out for the very same reason. With a Social-Democrat majority the likely outcome of the East German elections, full reunification may be a bleak prospect for West Germany's Right and Centre parties: but it now looks very unlikely that confederation will permanently satisfy the Germans in the East.

It might, conceivably, be a transitional stage. Hence the proviso that the full scale of the "reunified Germany" problem may only emerge "in the long run". But the transition will involve enormous problems of its own. What institutional arrangements, in Government and Parliament? What provisions for free movement of people, money, and goods? How about West German competition? What can be done about East German pollution? What forms of public and private aid? And will the removal of the frontier infect West Germany with inflation—a traumatic fear from the Weimar epoch? Already, there's been talk of a one-to-one exchange rate for Eastern and Western Marks. That could be as much a trauma for both sides as the Erhard currency

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reform of 1948, without necessarily the same salutary effects.

The other operative words, in discussing reunification, are "within the European Community". Again, a few have suggested that Germany might lose interest in the unification of Europe if German unity were in prospect. This seems highly unlikely: nor would it be reassuring. A reunified Germany of 77 million people needs all the more to be integrated into a stable system. Such a Germany, floating free from the European Community, would be a factor for instability and resentment, however much goodwill she displayed.

This is not to say that the Community can easily adapt to her very large presence. Even the arrival from East Germany of a score or so Members of the European Parliament, mostly on the Left, will set the big cat among the old pigeons; and the economic and other problems of uniting the two Germanies will equally beset the rest of the Community too. If nothing else hurts, the collective aid invoice for Central and Eastern Europe will be substantial, and all the more so if East Germany absorbs a lot of West German official aid. There may be, as German economists have argued, great investment opportunities. But private investment will not suffice to meet desperate needs.

Still more worrying is the place, if any, that reunified Germany will occupy in the Atlantic Alliance. Will the Soviet Union accept East Germany's entry into NATO? It could be argued that "neutrality" has lost its meaning, not only because all countries in Europe would be damaged by a modern war, but because the new relations between East and West may mean that there's nothing to be neutral about. If that were so, why impose neutrality on Austria and even East Germany? (And why, incidentally, should Sweden and Switzerland cling to neutrality themselves?) But is it so? And is the Soviet Union likely to accept such an argument? Until she does, disputes will continue, and the West should stick to its guns. A reunified Germany outside the Alliance would be still more destabilising than one outside the Community.

4. Internecine strife?

Othello's big wars may be over. But the plumèd troop remains. So do frontier problems. To put it mildly, the new situation in Central and Eastern Europe could be tumultuously unstable. When the walls came a-tumbling down, many observers evoked 1848 and the year of liberty. Sourer historians pointed to its sequel; and more pessimistic commentators recalled the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. With separatist uprisings in the Soviet Union and ethnic conflict there and in other countries, notably Yugoslavia, "Balkanisation" does seem to be on the cards. Hence the fear that small conflicts might once more engender larger troubles. Here too, stable systems seem to be needed; and federation or confederation may be the best hope.

5. A strategy?

So the free fall continues. No one can foresee the point of landing; but we should at least be trying to open and steer the parachute. One strategy might be as follows.

First, maintain the Alliance, and develop its non-military aspects. Secondly, use it to establish a mutual security system with the Soviet Union, growing out of the existing talks: the "open skies" proposal could be a first step. Thirdly, resist the deceleration of the European Community: accept East Germany, negotiate Austrian membership, stave off Turkey until her record is better, and offer association to the European countries in the East. Make it clear, however, to all concerned (including existing members) that the Community is a process, not a product, and that its objective, laid down in the EEC Treaty, no less, is "ever closer union".

In the longer run, the shape of things to come might well be a more civilian Atlantic Alliance in regular contact with the remains of the Warsaw Pact; a federated nucleus of the European Community within it (ideally but not necessarily including Britain, in close *rapport* with France); an inner periphery of Community member States which accept economic but not political union; and an outer periphery of associated States, some of them federations, whose internal and mutual tensions the Community relationship would help to ease.

The actual result, whatever one's efforts, is bound to be muddled and messy. Few parachutists ever land perfectly. But at least they try.

M

Aston Down

They're playing polo on Aston Down—
could have been the Raj or even France:
one of Boudin's rusty sandscapes
but this is England greening up.

unmounted horses are in sackcloth
the mounted ones have mallets poised
like the movement of a clock
lifted with the power to shock.

Michael Henry

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Dannie Abse

Anti-Clockwise (1)

"Nothing to do with sex, doctor." Her voice dies.
In the consulting room's firegrate, no fire.
Last summer's dried flowers, sweet lies, nest there.

Now if through her eyes I could slowly pan,
with ophthalmoscope, would I blunderingly
light up single beds in separate bedrooms?

Whispers and sighs. I cannot say, "What?" again.
So observe her mouth's theatre, how she turns
and turns her wedding ring, anti-clockwise.

Anti-Clockwise (2)

Before breakfast, from my bedroom window,
behold jogging Des, our grey-haired neighbour,
conspicuous in vest and shorts—how he
puffs and blows past our railings.
Rejuvenation therapy, he says.

I think of Abishag the Shunammite,
that most beautiful girl—sheer dynamite—
she ministered to the aged King.
Disaster: he knew her not. Soon was dead.
And Hermann Boerhaave, that Dutch physician,

(13th century) sweet buttery girls failing,
thought he would undo the mortal lock
by placing, instead, two untrousered youths
each side of the prostrate burgomaster.
With what results nobody knows. Don't mock,

only the young don't wish to be younger.
Some, credulous, still receive intramuscular
drug-muck, testicular extracts; some just
eat yoghurt. Once some blithely feasted
on viper-meat or drank youthful blood (cheers!)

from freshly opened veins—and not always
volunteers. So I suppose it's better
that my cock and cardiac minded neighbour
this bright and bloody early morning
(his doleful wife still staring at the ceiling)

should run anti-clockwise round the block.

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Magnolia, Golders Hill Park (1)

In the park's walled garden,
beneath the candelabra
of a magnolia tree,
I know a grained wooden seat
that those in distress
should sit upon in silence
when the tree's tonic flowering
is more holy than
a cathedral;
but let no virgin dare
to sit there after dark
lest next morning, profaned,
she be found loitering,
shouting unrestrained, "Rape! Rape!",
dazed, shivering and insane,
with the tree's white blossom
wildly scattered on the ground,
a little blood-stained.

Magnolia, Golders Hill Park (2)

Now in a dusty July
that will not come again,
I come again to this walled garden
past wooden seats inscribed:
IN MEMORY OF JANE FREEMAN,
IN MEMORY OF DORIS ABBOTS,
IN LOVING MEMORY
OF JOHN CONNELL RIP,
IN FONDEST MEMORY
OF SYLVIA LENNARD
WHO LOVED LIFE,
IN REMEMBRANCE
OF DAVID PERKINS
WHO LOVED THIS GARDEN,
IN LOVING MEMORY
OF DAD, ARTHUR ADAMS,
until I feel myself to be
the word DESOLATION,
wasting the afternoon away,
scribbling these pencilled lines
beneath a magnolia tree
now, itself, so humdrum a green,
so inconspicuous—like Pierre Magnol,
French botanist of the 17th century,
unknown today, his life wiped clean,
except he named this genus of tree:
the magnolia soulangeana,
the umbrella, the sweet bay,
the magnolia grandiflora
or bull bay,
and yulan, the Chinese magnolia.

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Darkness Encroaching

Philip Larkin & the Situation of Poetry—By STEPHEN WATSON

THERE WERE many reasons why Philip Larkin, long before his death in December 1985, had come to be regarded as the pre-eminent poet of his generation. Now that his *Collected Poems* has appeared,[1] it becomes all the more clear that his achievement was by no means as parochial, as "English", as might at first appear. Indeed, it is now possible to see that not only is he probably the most important English poet since Auden, but that his work has a significance that goes far beyond that specifically English provincialism, that love of the ordinary and the commonplace, the resolutely anti-heroic, which his work so staunchly defends against every temptation towards poetic afflatus. If this has grown clearer as the years have gone by, the achievement itself has not grown less.

His poetry was remarkable for any number of features. In the first place, Larkin managed to achieve that rarest of all things, the uniquely individual tone of voice which is the mark of a major poet. Even back in the 1940s this tone was, as he said of Yeats, as "pervasive as garlic":

> *Waiting for breakfast, while she brushed her hair,*
> *I looked down at the empty hotel yard*
> *Once meant for coaches. Cobblestones were wet,*
> *But sent no light back to the loaded sky,*
> *Sunk as it was with mist down to the roofs.*
> *Drainpipes and fire-escape climbed up*
> *Past rooms still burning their electric light:*
> *I thought: Featureless morning, featureless night.*

Moreover, it was a tone which managed at once, seemingly effortlessly, to do what all poetry has to do: to create a faith in the voice itself before any conscious consent has been granted to the often sour truths which it conveys. It contributed in turn to the careful invention or remaking of himself that was not the least of Larkin's achievements, that unique Larkinesque persona who is clearly not always to be believed.

For a certain type of person, nothing could be more difficult than the imagining, or re-imagining, of that which he or she is—the essential requirement of all persona poetry. Yet out of his private failings Larkin was entirely successful in putting together that "old-type natural fouled-up guy" who in his disillusionments, his sexual wistfulness, even his rages, seemed more the representative man of the age than any other, and also suggested at times a complete formulation of life outside the poetry.

This formulation was nothing if not radical. Of course it had nothing to do with the political connotations of that term; it was, rather, radical in the same way as some of the early Hemingway stories. The first stanza of the late poem "Aubade", possibly one of the greatest Larkin ever wrote, is characteristic (and the inclusion of the word "half" in the opening line an authentic stroke of genius):

> *I work all day, and get half-drunk at night.*
> *Waking at four to soundless dark, I stare.*
> *In time the curtain-edges will grow light.*
> *Till then I see what's really always there:*
> *Unresting death, a whole day nearer now,*
> *Making all thought impossible but how*
> *And where and when I shall myself die.*
> *Arid interrogation: yet the dread*
> *Of dying, and being dead,*
> *Flashes afresh to hold and horrify.*

This poem, like "Dockery and Son", "Talking in Bed", and many another, had the unusual quality of appearing almost as radical as reality itself. This was, of course, an *existential* radicalness, and it was not underwritten by any politics (at least in the conventional sense), Great Mother archetype, surrealist gesture, or anything else. It made his entire *oeuvre* an object-lesson in the fact that the artistic truthfulness of a work has no connection with the presence (or absence) of politics in it. Indeed, Larkin's poetry time and again demonstrates that it matters little whether the poet is fortunate enough to dwell in a quiet, calm country or is condemned to live in a violent, bloodthirsty one. In the latter, history might well be a nightmare; in the former, time itself is the holocaust. And, as with Larkin, it could drive the poet to his art with a passion quite the equal of anyone inflamed by social injustice.

Of Larkin, too, one is tempted to echo George Seferis's words on Cavafy: ". . . as a poet he appears to have been

[1] Philip Larkin, *Collected Poems* (ed. Anthony Thwaite, Marvell Press, Faber and Faber, 1988).

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condemned to the truth, his truth, on pain of death." In retrospect it scarcely matters that Larkin was a Tory—"Oh, I adore Mrs Thatcher", he once said in an interview—and could be notoriously Blimpish in his views. In the poetry, he had the courage not of the courageous but of those in pain (though this is often the same thing). Take, for instance, "Love Again":

> *Love again: wanking at ten past three*
> *(Surely he's taken her home by now?),*
> *The bedroom hot as a bakery,*
> *The drink gone dead, without showing how*
> *To meet tomorrow, and afterwards,*
> *And the usual pain, like dysentery.*
>
> *Someone else feeling her breasts and cunt,*
> *Someone else drowned in that lash-wide stare,*
> *And me supposed to be ignorant,*
> *Or find it funny, or not to care,*
> *Even . . . but why put it into words?*
> *Isolate rather this element*
>
> *That spreads through other lives like a tree*
> *And sways them on in a sort of sense*
> *And say why it never worked for me.*
> *Something to do with violence*
> *A long way back, and wrong rewards,*
> *And arrogant eternity.*

But Larkin was remarkable not simply because he was able to set down, as few before him, the ways in which sexual desire, through lack of fulfilment, could condense into a jealous, heart-sick rage (and in other poems into an "indigestible sterility"). His *furor poeticus*, as authentic as any contemporary's, was not just the inevitable discharge of a sexual loneliness and the depression which is so often its consequence. "Death", Saul Bellow once remarked in one of his novels, "is the dark backing, a mirror needs if we are to see anything." And so it was with Larkin.

ON THE FACE OF IT, nothing could be more unremarkable than the presence of death and the prospect of personal extinction as a poet's central obsession. It was, perhaps, no more unusual than Larkin's other preoccupations: the gap between pleasure and reality principles, and the illusions that flourish in between; the fear of personal failure; the *tristesse* of sex, especially for a certain type of awkward, rather unhappy person; the conflict between love (always seen as culminating in marriage) and work (i.e. poetry); love's incompetents; and, everywhere, the irresolute and infirm in spirit. Yet he was able to give the theme of death a treatment it had received nowhere else before, not least in the tradition of English poetry.

He was often at his most masterly in registering how certain central dreads, always kept slightly to the side of one's life, could encroach on the consciousness, returning with all the gathering, chilling force that the return of the repressed commonly possesses. On the subject of death especially, he became the great laureate of the manner in which its presence, suddenly registered, could jam the mind's self-protective devices, leaving consciousness without any form of psychic crash-helmet, face down in a condition of stunned helplessness. His skill in capturing the literal, visceral force of this process was all the more remarkable if Matthew Arnold's 1853 preface to his own poems is recalled. There Arnold spoke of a certain type of inferior poem: ". . . those in which the suffering finds no vent in action; in which a continuous state of mental distress is prolonged, unrelieved by incident, hope or resistance; in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done." And he characterised these painful (but not tragic) situations as "morbid" and "monotonous", the works themselves as ones from which "no poetical enjoyment can be derived".

LARKIN is the first English poet to commit all these sins and get away with it. In a good percentage of his poetry there is, precisely, "everything to be endured, nothing to be done"—or "Nothing to be said", as his poem of that title concludes in *The Whitsun Weddings*. Poetically, he is nowhere more assured, more distinctive, than in pieces like "Ambulances", in which bystanders, having seen a body stowed away in an ambulance, find a darkness encroaching, all the more insidious for being sub-verbal:

> *And sense the solving emptiness*
> *That lies just under all we do,*
> *And for a second get it whole,*
> *So permanent and blank and true.*

Whether out of a personal drive towards authenticity or the rage common amongst writers to return again and again to precisely that which defeats their powers of response, Larkin, it seems, could not cease tilting at matters for which his poetry, let alone himself, was no match. The poetry was in the impossibility, the always unequal struggle to respond to those existential scandals, death most of all, before which all symbols become paltry and inadequate, all resources of feeling strangely pitiful. Paradoxically, it was a blankness (but a blankness which hurt) which was most uniquely his.

By a further paradox, this feature of his poetry not only gave back to the reader the conviction that his or her feelings had a metaphysical depth beyond that of the rational intellect, but it also seemed to give further definition to a 20th-century humanism and the sensibility that went hand in hand with it. Famous poems like "Church Going" were definitive of a new moment in this humanism: not only was God dead, but it was simply taken for granted that this was so; spiritual poverty now expressed itself in numbness rather than in anguish.

Still other poems showed repeatedly that, having more or less confidently said goodbye to God, the average man or woman in the 20th century could find no compensatory belief in the increased stature or grandeur of Man. On the contrary, what was left was nothing more than themselves—creatures who, still faced with the crucial questions of existence, were that much more inclined to lapse into vacuousness in a world helpless in its secularity. Though some might point to the great good humour with which Larkin accepted this circumstance, there is no doubt that part of his popular-

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ity with a wide public lay in the definition he gave to a contemporary way-of-life whose means—symbolic, poetic, or otherwise—were simply no longer adequate to the inner needs of the human being. The helplessness itself seemed emblematic. Moreover, it made reading his poetry akin to a political experience. Directly or indirectly, it pointed to what many commentators have called the most telling political dimension to 20th-century experience: the helplessness of the individual.

THERE WAS, of course, another side to his poetry. If Larkin characteristically had one of the rarer gifts in being able to say brutally simple things, his poetry also illuminates the resonance gained when such brutal things, before which people stand more or less defeated, are expressed with a paradoxical tenderness. Like Hardy, he could be gentle as well as straightforwardly savage, and the quality of emotion achieved is all too evident in a poem like "Afternoons", in which he suggests the sense of displacement experienced by young mothers foregathering at the "new recreation ground":

Before them, the wind
Is ruining their courting-places

That are still courting-places
(But the lovers are all in school),
And their children, so intent on
Finding more unripe acorns,
Expect to be taken home.
Their beauty has thickened.
Something is pushing them
To the side of their own lives.

The sad, sympathetic awe with which Larkin noted the processes and actions of time was always the obverse side to that blanking glare of death, in which the senses short-circuited. Like so much of Hardy, it gave renewed depth to the sense the living sometimes have of being mere survivors, their lives no more than a temporary life-raft. In short, a sense of compassion.

Still another aspect of this obverse side to his gifts was Larkin's residual yet constant nostalgia for a "beyond", an "elsewhere". In poems like "Here", with its reaching after "unfenced existence", he defined himself as a late Romantic, and he also gave new definition to what was left for Romanticism. In a way that no other contemporary was able to match, Larkin was still able to write poems (albeit a handful) which glimmered with a kind of transcendence—one which, even as it seemed to hold out the promise of a longed-for escape or plenitude, evaporated into absence or nothingness.

This absolutely contemporary note was caught even more perfectly in the spiritual vanishing-act with which his poem "High Windows" concludes—the thought of the windows with their "sun-comprehending glass" opening out on to "the deep blue air, that shows/Nothing, and is nowhere, and is endless." Such moments were, as Barbara Everett has noted,[2] what remained to Larkin of Eden; but they were always qualified in such a way as to call into question their substantial reality; they have the evanescence of breath misting on glass. They were also unique in suggesting what remained to us of the metaphysical in the second half of the 20th century.

Nevertheless, the definitive manner in which Larkin handled such matters will not in the future, I think, be seen as his greatest achievement. As a poet, Philip Larkin was undoubtedly remarkable in managing to project himself as one of the sadder hearts in the sad supermarket of post-War British culture, turning even technology—especially technology—into a version of melancholy. It was no mean feat to produce poems which, with absolute rhythmical poise and sureness of tone, were able to ingest "floatings of industrial froth", billboards that screened "graves with custard", as well as the poverty of human desires (rather than their vanity) in a society both consumerist and tasteless. Nobody could fail to respond to his modernity, not least to those completely modern disenchantments that began with lines like "They fuck you up, your mum and dad".

BUT LARKIN was not necessarily one of a kind in subscribing to a view of the world in which the world refuses to be saved, love seldom (if ever) triumphs, human motives remain perplexed, and so forth. Taken as a whole, his work amounts to a transformation in the very idea of poetry, one quite the equal to that effected by Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, even if characteristically less spectacular in his case. It is with the mature Larkin particularly that the fate of poetry in the contemporary world receives one of its most acute, summarising definitions. In fact, it is with him, especially, that what had been for centuries the central cultural achievement of the English-speaking peoples—the art of poetry—is relegated more conclusively than ever before to the status of a minor art. What is more, it now seems as if it was Larkin's greatest achievement of all that he was capable of building the relegation of poetry in the modern world (plus the marginalisation of the poet) into his own work, into its very essence.

Some of this century's earlier poets, like Pound and Eliot, were still able to display the ambition and conviction that poetry was the central art (though many of the strains and lacunae in their work may be read as a partial reflection of the impossibility of sustaining such a belief, even in their heyday). But Larkin comes that much later; he is "after"—after even the "minor atlantic Goethe" which was all that W. H. Auden aspired to be towards the end of his career. With Larkin's advent, it is not that poetry has died or that many people have ceased to read, write, or even propagandise for it. It is rather that the *idea* of poetry has died. The art has now to fend for itself in a world which is, metaphysically-speaking, "post-poetry", a world not simply English. Surely it is this world to which Milan Kundera was alluding when, in 1988,[3] he asked:

"Where are the successors to Octavio Paz, to René Char?

[2] Barbara Everett, "Larkin's Edens", in *English*, no. 139 (1982).
[3] Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel* (Faber and Faber, 1988), p. 42.

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Where are the great poets now? Have they vanished, or have their voices only grown inaudible? In any case, an immense change in our Europe, which was hitherto unthinkable without its poets. . . ."

Critic vs Poet

IT IS THIS SITUATION which is everywhere inscribed in Larkin, in both poetry and criticism, life as well as work. All the half-joking put-downs and famous disclaimers of his—"*Foreign* poetry? No!"; "Oh, for Christ's sake, one doesn't *study* poets! You *read* them, and think, That's marvellous, how is it done, could I do it?"; "You must realise I've never had 'ideas' about poetry"—can be taken on one level as the self-protective bluff of a man intent on remaining immured in his provincialism and philistinism.

On another, deeper level, however, they were the defensive measures of a poet for whom poetry was everywhere on the defensive. Even the relentless prosaicism of the verse—the opening lines (like "Once I'm sure there's nothing going on" from "Church Going") which seem so much verbal mashed-potato by comparison with the soufflés of earlier eras—represents more than his efforts to remain "less deceived" and down-to-earth in a down-at-heels age. Like his philistinism, which was largely a mock-philistinism, this was all part of the strategic retreat of someone who took poetry as seriously as anyone does who is hurt into it, but knows that it is now under attack as never before. Similarly, all the savage or mock-savage assaults on the idea of culture ("Get stewed:/Books are a load of crap") underline, whatever else they might do, the power of a world in which poetry can no longer occupy the high ground, any sort of high ground. In one or other way, verbal gestures like these are symptoms of a social order which has become ever more separable from its poets, "post-poetry", or "beyond culture".

No need to rehearse the factors which have been responsible for the relegation of poetry. An art-form which, as Auden liked to say, "still insists upon being read or ignored", could hardly compete for an audience offered the blandishments of film, mass-spectator sports, and the home-video. Against media like these, poetry was not (and never could have been) in the running. In part they explain what Edwin Muir, among many others, noted in his Charles Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard University in the late 1950s, underscoring the enormous decline in the effective range and influence of the art:

> "That, as we all know, has greatly shrunk in the last two centuries, and shrunk alarmingly in the country we live in. At present, poetry is neglected in all civilised countries, and it appears to be declining even in what we call uncivilised ones. . . . Sometimes poets are visited by a horrified surprise at the realisation that things should be as bad as they are; that their audience has melted away."[4]

Yet in Larkin's particular time there was a factor far more consequential in the marginalisation of poet and poetry than the new media and their easy attractions, and it seems more than coincidental that many another poet was growing into awareness of this at almost the same time as Larkin's poetry was coming of age.

Randall Jarrell, for instance, in a famous essay first published in the 1950s,[5] noted that he, like everybody else, was now living in what was pre-eminently "an age of criticism". As he went on to explain:

> ". . . an age of criticism is not an age of writing, nor an age of reading: it is an age of criticism. People still read, still write—and well; but for many of them it is the art of criticism which has become the representative or Archetypal act of the intellectual."

In effect, what Jarrell was saying, as well as arguing against, was that criticism had become that much more important than poetry. He was unable to know at that time that his plea would be in vain; that in every decade since, the critic has gained greater ascendancy, and the decline of the poet has been that much more precipitous.

THROUGHOUT HIS CAREER Philip Larkin almost never failed to exhibit a kind of hatred, however well-mannered, even genial, towards the academic critic and Academe in general. This was far from being the resentful attitude of someone who once stuttered too badly ever to think of becoming a lecturer; nor was it chiefly a result of his realisation that the academic worm of thought can be particularly destructive of that "creative innocence" which the poet needs to protect if he is ever to get a poem written at all. Larkin regularly deplored what he called the "cunning merger between poet, literary critic and academic critic (three classes now notoriously indistinguishable)", this having alienated poetry's old, pleasure-loving audience.

The reasons for Larkin's antipathy towards the literary-critical establishment went further. From the outset of his poetic maturity, he would seem to have been acutely aware that if poetry was in the wars (and losing), its chief enemy was not the by now almost venerable figure of the 19th-century bourgeois philistine, reincarnated in the 20th century as yobbo or yuppie, but in fact no less a figure than the critic.

In this he was anything but provincial. Indeed, his poetry and prose repeatedly registered the presence of a pressure that by the 1950s had become well-nigh global, as the remarks of Octavio Paz, a poet utterly remote from Larkin in style and preoccupations, indicate:

> "When I went back to France after 1950, there had been a fresh cultural development—not just in France, in fact, but throughout the world. This was the seizure of power by the professors, the new pre-eminence of critics over creators. The theoreticians had managed to drive out the poets and the novelists."[6]

Perhaps it has never been the case (as some have fondly imagined) that criticism has existed, humbly, simply, for the

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[4] Edwin Muir, *The Estate of Poetry* (The Hogarth Press, 1962), p. 2.

[5] Randall Jarrell, *Poetry and the Age* (Faber and Faber, 1955), pp. 73-74.

[6] Octavio Paz, "After the Cultural Delirium", ENCOUNTER, July-August 1986, p. 67.

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sake of the work of art which it criticised. George Steiner may have been much closer to the general truth when he observed that the critic "is not, as the cliché would have it, a failed artist, but a 'counterstater' and rival to the work", and implied that this has always been the case.[7] Nevertheless, it is clear that by the time Larkin came into his poetic maturity, poetry had been dethroned, and criticism (and an idea of criticism) enthroned in a palace-coup which did not simply preserve the always-existent gap between the one activity and the other, but widened that gap until it became an outright antagonism.

The supremacy of critic over poet—now virtually legalised as the normal state of affairs in universities world-wide—had its origins in a circumstance that appeared long before Larkin came to prominence. The battle itself, as well as the respective fortunes of the combatants, had its origins in large part in a social process of professionalisation that began to take place in many areas of life during the 20th century. Literary studies, which had had their beginnings in the two camps of philology and *belles lettres*, gradually lost their amateur status and were taken over by the specialist. As in the case of medicine, it meant that more and more the critic no longer addressed himself (as "the man of letters" once did) to the general public, but rather to fellow professionals. No one would now expect the gerontologist to speak professionally to anyone but the professional gerontologist; and so it became with the 20th-century literary critic. The process might have been deplored—to this day there are accusations against critics for betraying their responsibility to the public, for surrounding literature with an outrageous, mystifying jargon comprehensible only to initiates—but it was part and parcel of a social transformation that has been, quite simply, unstoppable.

While the professionals took power in Academe, however, the survivors of the palace-coup have gone on living. They were mainly those anti-professionals or amateurs who continued to see in literature something of a moral and spiritual force, a repository of wisdom and precepts which could be applied directly to life. They have never ceased to be scandalised by what professional critics have made of both criticism and literature, redefining what the former was supposed to be about, turning on its head what the latter was always taken as being for.

To the thoroughly professionalised critic, newly ensconced in the university, poetry literally existed, and not necessarily cynically, for the sake of criticism. Its *raison d'être* was to provide raw material for post-graduate seminars in "the politics of representation" (or whatever the critical method dictated). For the amateur, of whom obviously Larkin was one, poetry went on having to do with imagination, moral precept, pleasure. In countless variations, he continued to repeat the same glum dictum: "First and foremost, writing poems should be a pleasure. So should reading them, by God." Historically, the art-form justified its existence for exactly the reason that a fellow-spirit, D. J. Enright, affirmed in 1980, in his introduction to *The Oxford Book of Contemporary Verse 1945-1980*: ". . . as the finest, most efficient vehicle for the passing on of what wisdom and courage the race has painfully acquired."

Yet such affirmations now seemed hopelessly out-of-touch, anachronistic, fuddy-duddy. Poets—to alter slightly one of Larkin's most famous lines—had long since been pushed to the side of their own lives. And so had poetry. What had begun with Randall Jarrell's wonderful joke about the status of the poet in an age of criticism (as if they were all pigs who had mistakenly wandered into a bacon-judging contest only to hear the critics hissing, "Go away, pig! What do you know about bacon?") had culminated in the not so humorous articles of Barthes and Foucault on "the death of the author", and showed no signs of ending there. In the context of such professionalisation, the wish of Octavio Paz seemed nothing but forlorn: ". . . we must restore to the imagination the function that has been usurped by the professors and theoreticians."

Given the institutional victory that had taken place decades before, it was again no contest. But all this did serve one function. It made Larkin's professional career as a librarian in the University of Hull, living on the edge of things in the north-east corner of England for most of his adult life, seem more than the choice of a man who often expressed a dislike for being in the limelight. It seemed almost symbolic—the apt life and appropriate place for poetry, now that it had been forced into exile.

THIS INFERENCE is no doubt far-fetched. But the war between poetry and criticism is far from superficial or trivial, not simply the old opposition between those who work from the head and those who rely more on the heart. Until quite recently, most poets, great or small, have been unable to jettison a belief in language as Logos, a linguistic faith that through luck and hard work words could come to enshrine real presences, even a spiritual essence; and that in those rare moments of what used to be called inspiration they could actually *become* the objects or events which they designated.

"No metaphor, remember, can express real historical unhappiness", Auden wrote. But Auden, no less than Larkin, evidently worked on the assumption that a metaphor could. He had no choice. The earth might be unattainable in words—art, yes, was never life—yet traditionally the poet has not been able to abandon the attempt to make it attainable, if only because the effort was partly constitutive of the poetic impulse. "The oneness of thing and word", Erich Heller, one of the great critics of poetry, has said, "is the essence of great poetry."[8] Given the structure of language, the endeavour to achieve this oneness might appear to be the most futile of Sisyphean tasks. Yet for centuries of poets, it might be said, the creative struggle was defined by the inherent impossibility of the task. They knew intuitively that without it a part of the poetic impulse would wither and die.

It is not difficult to see that this hard task has grown ever harder, particularly for the poet in the latter half of the 20th

[7] George Steiner, *George Steiner: A Reader* (Penguin, 1984), p. 82.

[8] Erich Heller, *In The Age of Prose: Literary and Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 82.

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century. Contemporary literary theory is based largely on the discovery that word is not world; that whatever identity there might happen to be between the two is the arbitrary product of convention; and that, worst of all, to proceed on the basis that language is (or at least *can be*) world is to be subject to the most reactionary of delusions. If anything, it has been the political task of such linguistically-based theory to remind us (and often enough the poet as well) that language is not reality, that not even the most realistic of details are to be taken at face value.

THE POET'S GREATEST, even immemorial, task has been to make the real *real*, to create a verbal artefact which closes the gap between language and reality. But the literary theoretician's essential gesture has been to do nothing so much as prise open that gap once again, to make the relationship dissonant, and to make it speak that dissonance rather than the ecstasy of at-oneness.

On the basis of this distinction alone—and it is not the only one—it is easy to see why the relationship between most poets and most theoreticians should have grown less than friendly. At root, two absolutely opposed conceptions of language are involved, and therefore two entirely different modes of being in the world. From the poet's point of view, Larkin's "Cut Grass" is one of the most exquisite of lyrics:

Cut grass lies frail:
Brief is the breath
Mown stalks exhale.
Long, long the death

It dies in the white hours
Of young-leafed June
With chestnut flowers,
With hedges snowlike strewn,

White lilac bowed,
Lost lanes of Queen Anne's lace,
And that high-builded cloud
Moving at summer's pace.

To praise this poem as a small, beautifully-paced epiphany would be the poet's legitimate response. For a greater measure of intellectual respectability, attention could also be drawn to that order of nature which the poem celebrates (and which by a nice irony, given the global ecological crisis, makes a poem about a flower quite as responsible as anything about the Bomb).

Yet, to the theoretician's ears, such talk about natural beauty, its evanescence and duration, would be quite illegitimate, even laughable. What we have with a lyric like Larkin's, the literary theorist would say, is a late version of pastoral—a mode all the more dubious given its appearance (or, should I say, construction) in an historical moment of late capitalism. What needs to be demystified here is the manner in which the poem covers over the contradictions in late capitalist culture through recourse to an ideal (i.e. idealised) realm of nature. The poem might appear to be authentic but, as theorised, necessarily becomes inauthentic.

Today it sometimes seems that to be critically initiated is to be poetically disenfranchised. Larkin might not have put it in these terms but he was none the less acutely aware of the situation. In his time, the poet was compelled to exist in a new world of disenchantment, one that went far beyond that which Hegel had noted and Hölderlin lamented before his descent into madness. It made little difference whether the theory of the moment was New Criticism or, much later, post-structuralism. One after another the critical discourses possessed an institutional power-base; they literally ate poetry alive.

And in one poem after another Larkin counter-attacked, fashioning counter-statement after counter-statement with all the vigour of someone whose position had been revealed as threadbare and who had nothing left to lose. According to critical theory, *all* symbolic resolutions must be treated as suspect if not spurious—illegitimate psychic escape-hatches servicing invalid psychological needs. Very well, then, he would create poems which did nothing so much as move unerringly to "closure", leaving the text already fully "interrogated".

STATE-OF-THE-ART criticism explicitly sidelined any vocabulary which made it possible legitimately to praise a poem or person; Larkin set about using the old words with something close to relish. Theory discoursed on the illusion of the bourgeois subject; Larkin did nothing so well as give this illusion a force, a real presence, making talk about "the desubstantialisation of the self" seem so much nonsense. Beauty was *passé*, including the word itself; well, he would go on writing poems like "Cut Grass" and "Dublinesque" (the latter daringly re-incorporating the outmoded word). If literature now existed for the machinations of the air-conditioned seminar-room, he would deliberately write poems about which nothing could be said—except that the author was, of course, "all wrong".

At times there seemed to be even an element of perversity in all this. In his famous essay of 1921, T. S. Eliot had laid down the law: "We can only say that it appears likely that poets in our civilisation, as it exists at present, must be *difficult*." Larkin, as if he had deliberately set about turning all the *obiter dicta* of Modernism on their heads, consistently maintained of his own work: "When you've read a poem, that's it, it's all quite clear what it means."

In a sense, there was little else he could do. Not being a member of Academe, he had little chance of being caught up in the self-perpetuating machinery of contemporary criticism, whose values had so little to do with the actual needs of men and women. Like the character in one of his most memorable poems, "Mr Bleaney", he kept on plugging away at the same old view of the art of poetry, whose values were sanctioned by tradition. In his book of miscellaneous prose pieces, *Required Writing* (1983), a volume which was tantamount to his defence of poetry, he treated as simply axiomatic the idea that the art justified itself through being "moving" and "memorable", that it existed to help people "endure" or "enjoy". And he liked to quote Thomas Hardy:

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"All those wonderful *dicta* about poetry: 'the poet should touch our hearts by showing his own', 'the poet takes note of nothing that he cannot feel', 'the emotion of all the ages and the thought of his own'—Hardy knew what it was all about."

Under Siege

THROUGHOUT HIS LIFE, Larkin showed himself to be quite incapable of understanding or appreciating that generically modern type of art and literature which, far from being at odds with criticism or theory, actually fed off it. Modernism and what we would now call *écriture* were, to him, just so many forms of "mystification and outrage". He was conspicuously scandalised by those kinds of text where the question of any relation to reality had lost any meaning, in which reality had disintegrated into the means of expression, and for whom even the idea of truth, or untruth, had disappeared. He simply would not have understood the common contemporary belief that all means of depicting reality are equally valid, the means themselves being the only fit object of study. He would have abhorred some of the more recent developments in American poetry, such as this extract from Clark Coolidge's "The Maintains" (Coolidge is a poet who belongs to the Language School in the USA; his work embodies some of the central tenets of French post-structuralist theory):

past of blow
blimp one home
blister copper as sap but one
due from ice at tennis
around a cent wind
cynosure
any of a central able carp

Here, as one critic has said, ". . . we are forced to read *in* the language rather than through it".[9] Larkin would probably have replied that you can only read *in* language of this sort if you have already done a university post-graduate course in post-structuralist linguistics. Moreover, he might have pointed out that such poetry (so unlike his own with its empiricist faith that language is a window through which you can see the world) must necessarily renounce any hope of reaching a wider audience. If pressed, he could have drawn attention to the fact that the moment of the *avant-garde*—the belief that aesthetic shock-troops could have a substantial political effect on society—had long since passed; and he could even have quoted some of the words of the Italian poet, Eugenio Montale, in self-defence:

> "Modern artists (I don't mean all of them) who, through natural impotence or fear of walking down already travelled streets or out of a misguided respect for the ineffability of life, refuse to give it a form; those who deliberately exclude every pleasant sound from music, every figurative element from painting, every syntactical progression from the written word, condemn themselves to this: to not circulating, not existing for anyone. Since there is no possibility for a great communion between the public and the artist, they also reject the ultimate possibility of social significance which an art born of life always has: to return to life, to serve man, to say something for him."[10]

Yet Larkin could hardly escape a related dilemma. The poet who (as fellow poets like John Wain have said) singlehandedly brought back poetry to a wide, devoted audience, bypassing the mediations of the critics, and who would seem, if anything, to have halted the marginalisation of poetry since the time of Modernism and before, in reality could do nothing to resist the process I have highlighted. Although he was able to reach this audience on his own terms, without any evident artistic compromise, almost every poem he wrote embodied an aesthetic (call it "realist", call it "empiricist") which was quite outmoded, even helplessly vulnerable, before the most esteemed modes of critical discourse in his time. That long historical process in which professional criticism has gone on growing more and more powerful, the poet weaker and weaker by comparison, was neither circumvented nor, finally, even delayed in its onward progress. The major poet of his era was in reality a minor poet not because there was anything particularly minor about his poetry—volume by volume, no other English poet in the 20th century achieves so high a number of absolute successes—but because poetry itself had become minor, and criticism had placed itself in a position to decree it so.

ONE CAN SEE THIS even more clearly if one enumerates several additional virtues of Larkin's poetry, using a language appropriate to it. Like no one else, Larkin was quite unashamed in his efforts to bring back certain qualities from their private exile in the modern world, producing many a poem which showed human beings still capable of love (if only momentarily), sympathy, wonder, and even solidarity (though in his case it took the form of the fellowship of sadness). He did this at a time when in intellectual circles in the Western world, and certainly in its seminar-rooms, there no longer existed the words for even acknowledging such things. He created a body of work in which the author, far from disappearing into some vast, free-floating matrix of signs, defined an identity in such indelible tones that it was possible for the reader to believe that he was actually being addressed by the poet: that one soul was talking to another.

Moreover, in poems like "Vers de Société" or "The Building", it seemed once more as if art really could contemplate ideologically uncensored, lived experience, producing a particular chill of recognition rather than the pre-digested truths of ideology. In still others ("Coming", for instance), he implicitly revealed that the real conflict for all the arts is not between competing ideologies (say, liberalism or Marxism), but between that which brings life, preserving a fidelity towards being, its mystery and its terror, and those manifold powers which deny just these.

While he did so, the chasm between all that his work

[9] Quoted by Marjorie Perloff in "New Poetry: Transatlantic Disagreements", *The Times Literary Supplement*, 20-26 January 1989, p. 60.

[10] Eugenio Montale, "The Second Life of Art", *The New York Review of Books*, 16 April 1981, p. 19.

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embodied and the often self-enclosed circle of the critical Establishment grew deeper. From the perspective of the present his poetry appears ever more helpless in its humanity, as if it were perpetually in some sort of beginner's class, while the academic powers-that-be appear always more central and critically self-assured. Nowadays one has only to juxtapose the names of Larkin and Lacan to see who is major planet, who minor, burnt-out satellite, and what the relative status of poetry and theory amounts to. It remains to be seen whether those who used to go to this art for insight, revelation, wisdom, will in future have to beg for these all the more (with critical theory always there to assure them that it is right that they should go begging, that poetry itself should be a suppliant). For it is still uncertain whether there exists a solution to poetry's situation more effective than that proposed by Larkin himself.

In any case, the distinction is all on his side. In being poetically so right (so very often) and being theoretically so very wrong (always), he focused as no one else before him the dilemma of poetry in the contemporary world—revealing the extent to which it had been relegated, and why it was now forced to exist in its own permanent state of emergency.

Unpacking

Scallop, clam, periwinkle . . . shells spill,
strew the garage floor with kids' short-shadowed days.
I gather up Bardsey, San Raphael, St Ives . . .
then my fingers falter: a cranial shard,
skull thin, homely as Easter egg.

Outside I feel where memory echoes
and the life subtends, finger grains
of cold Orcadian shore where bone articulates,
recall the sea-cracked Viking cyst,
the tumble of millennial bones beneath the cliff.

Who, at her grave's closing, imagined this
under song-line stars ten thousand miles away?

I search for excuse, for commonality . . . .
For seven years we watched the sun's ship
burn beyond the Brough where now Thorfinn's palace
is two stones high; knew island Spring's flowery
effusion; seals croon summer; like her paced silent
Brodgar Ring: gulls' high cries, white against black sky.

(And where's that image? In our empty heads
beyond the surgeons' grasp like this poem we make,
me at my desk above the sea, words ravelling,
shadows streaming from my pen. Soon coffee
then the teaching day among the careless,
surplus, hectic young. 'What is mind? No matter.
What is matter? Never mind.' Science rests on ghosts.)

Words. Runes chopped. Rhyme turned Blood Axe's blade-fury.
Thorfinn hacked a hymning bishopric my Oxford masters
still enjoy, their drawled conviction full of power's
bilabial expletives, making life sentences
of 'property', 'propriety', 'proprietary';
'proper respect' offered for a thousand years.

No longer tongue-tied, free to cause offence,
I hold this bone key to the word-hoard,
heel the hard Australian earth, re-inter,
say . . . .

Selwyn Pritchard

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NOTES & TOPICS

A Tory Seer

By Geoffrey Wheatcroft

"THAT VILE PUB, the King and Keys", Colin Welch called it at T. E. Utley's memorial service, and vile it was even by the standards of London pubs, its awfulness tempered by the extraordinary cabaret which the staff of the *Telegraph* from next door in Fleet Street put on. It was further mitigated: at the table behind the door sat T. E. Utley, talking to his court of young admirers and unfailingly beautiful secretaries, buying and being bought drinks, waiting for Brigid to pick him up, and surveying, as it were, the carnage around him. As it were, because in "Peter" Utley's serene face one eye was covered with a patch, the other closed.

His blindness from boyhood was in one sense important, in another insignificant. He had developed perforce a formidable memory, as those of us who can take notes and can look things up again are not obliged to, and might almost regret. Utley sometimes referred to his blindness in a matter-of-fact way and without a trace of self-pity. It made remarkably little difference to his career.

After wartime Cambridge (where he read History) he worked for *The Times*, *The Observer*, *Sunday Times*, and *Spectator*. Then he joined the *Daily Telegraph* where he spent twenty mostly happy years as leader writer, assistant editor and columnist. He made his name not only as a workaday journalist but as pamphleteer and "Tory philosopher"—the seer of the title of a recent anthology, *A Tory Seer: The Selected Journalism of T. E. Utley*.[1]

For years he was a resistance leader. It is hard now to remember—or to understand—the intellectual hegemony which socialism and collectivism appeared to enjoy in the post-War years, when intelligent, cocksure Socialists like Tony Crosland thought that there remained merely the technical problems of how to enjoy the fruits of a planned economy which must inevitably become richer and richer—and when many Conservatives silently agreed that they had lost the day.

Utley did not. He addressed himself to the question of what the Conservative tradition had still to offer. Had Conservatism now confined itself to "the unheroic function of holding a balance between its opponents' positions"? Was it a positive or a negative creed? What did it mean? All of these are examined from different angles in "What is a Tory?", the first section of *A Tory Seer*.

One answer is Johnson's definition of one who adheres to the ancient constitution of the state and the apostolic hierarchy of the Church of England, a description Utley exactly matched. Both his constitutionalism and his churchmanship were sane and balanced, if at times a little self-conscious. The section of the book on ecclesiastical questions makes dispiriting reading. In a column not included in the anthology, Utley dealt all too charitably with of one of Mrs Thatcher's strange court of wizards and mountebanks, contrasting the man's hot-gospelling with "my own arid Anglicanism", an odd phrase if only as an unconscious slip. Didn't he mean "austere"? (No one, surely, wants to think of his own faith as dry and unnourishing.) In any case, the book—Utley's life—covers the period when the Church of England changed from a good joke to a bad one (the hierarchy may be apostolic, but just look at them).

There were tensions, not to say occasional contradictions, in Utley's thought. A tension between the needs of freedom and authority is common to almost all political thinkers. For a Tory, there is further potential contradiction. Government cannot "will the good society", Utley says, quoting the lines about what kings or laws can cause or cure (he says that they are wrongly attributed to Samuel Johnson rather than Oliver Goldsmith; surely they were written by Johnson for insertion into Goldsmith's *The Traveller*?).

But pessimism cannot itself constitute an idea. Perhaps what makes Conservatism valuable in practice vitiates it as theory. Perhaps it is wrong to think of Peter Utley as a "philosopher" rather than an empirical commentator. Perhaps that is true of all of them from Professor Michael Oakeshott to every hack backbencher with his pamphlet on "My Tory Philosophy". Perhaps, indeed, "Tory thought" is an oxymoron, and a Conservative Philosophy Group is what Oliver St John Gogarty called the Royal Hibernian Academy—a treble contradiction in terms.

AT ANY RATE, Utley is at his most convincing when he takes on concrete issues. He recalls Maurice Green, the former editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, saying that the right to smoke was, "along with Ulster", the only subject on which "Utley writes with a small semblance of sincere feeling"; and although this is a nice joke against himself it may not be coincidence that he did in fact write very well on both of them. He rehearses the arguments about smoking (in an article which ends with the words "sack Mrs Edwina Currie"). Again, he does not fully resolve his own contradictions here. To say that "I, for example, am a libertarian about smoking. I am not a libertarian . . . about the drug traffic", doubtless expresses most people's view, but it does not deal with the awkward fact that every argument against "the drug traffic" is *a fortiori* an argument against the unrestricted right to smoke.

That piece appeared in *The Times* where Utley migrated in the last years of his life. There had been an honourable disagreement between him and the new editor of the *Tele-*

[1] *A Tory Seer: The Selected Journalism of T. E. Utley*. Edited by CHARLES MOORE and SIMON HEFFER. Hamish Hamilton, £15.95.

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graph, Max Hastings, about Northern Ireland. Peter was a staunch Unionist, whose wife and children were Roman Catholics, who stood against Paisley in a general election, and who would have been delighted by last autumn's Conservative Conference vote to run Tory candidates in Ulster.

He saw the absurdity of forcing a million people against their will into another state (even if the people of that state really wanted them, which is an interesting "if"), and saw as well the futility of the incessant "initiatives" which British governments have been inflicting on Ulster these past twenty years.

He had the advantage in this context of knowing a great deal of Irish as of British history. Reading these pages, you see that his double First was no mere technical qualification. The pieces in the book are arranged generically but, as Enoch Powell says in his Introduction, they are almost more illuminating when read chronologically: a commentary fascinating to anyone interested in post-War British history, however much or little they sympathise with Utley's views. His political and ecclesiastical attitudes were indeed rooted in history—and he was much too good an historian not to see further contradictions.

HE HIMSELF was a Burkean Tory, deeply grounded in a tradition which was in many ways not merely inimical to Manchester economic individualism but its antithesis. He denounced at different times free trade and the free market, advocated protection, thought that vested interests were entitled to privilege "as such", and that corporatism should not be inherently condemned.

Came the 1960s and 1970s: corporatism, planning protectionism, and buttering up vested interest were tried by Conservative governments as well as Labour, and failed. One or two Tories—Enoch Powell, Keith Joseph—began to look again at the *laissez—faire* tradition, and so did Margaret Thatcher. Of course, she has never been a true Manchester liberal. One or two in her Party might be so described—Jack Bruce-Gardyne, John Biffen—and much good has it done them. Her own politics are rather those of Lord Copper and the *Daily Beast*, "self-sufficiency at home, self-assertion abroad", and this combination of *enrichez vous* and populist nationalism has made her in electoral terms the most successful Party leader of the century. She succeeded with some help from Peter Utley, as she has generously acknowledged (she contributes a Foreword to this book), but was her Toryism his? Is she, in his sense, a Tory at all?

Two of the most penetrating pieces in this book are on Sir Robert Peel. Utley describes him as the man who "first defended the Irish Protestants and then betrayed them . . . first attacked the Great Reform Bill and then grovelled to it . . . first supported the Corn Laws and then abolished them". Harsh words; but then, in his own time, Utley was to witness tergiversations just as striking, and sometimes to defend them. He writes sardonically about the practice of "historical body-snatching" and the way in which, on the bicentenary of Peel's birth, his mantle had been claimed by her acolytes for Mrs Thatcher, absurdly so. As Utley rightly said, Peel was the founder and master of "what may be called 'concessionary' Conservatism". Its characteristic is to resist change until it becomes inevitable, and then to concede it with as little fuss and as much obeisance to tradition as possible. Beyond that, Peel assumed "that his political opponents represented the future".

That is an accurate description of most Conservative politicians—it is conspicuously true of "the great Lord Salisbury" to whom Utley makes the ritual genuflection—from Peel until Mrs Thatcher. It is conspicuously not true of her, who is not so much conservative as part reactionary and part radical.

In April 1988, Utley wrote a column about the Health Service and the self-defeating pursuit of absolute equality as described in an Institute of Economic Affairs pamphlet which "I rather hope Mrs Thatcher does not read" lest she incautiously quote it too freely. He added that he was about to go into a public ward for a short operation:

> ". . . having failed to get a private bed in the hospital of my choice. Whether this is intolerable inequality, acceptable inequality or, as I suspect, just an infernal unavoidable nuisance, I do not know. Anyway, it will involve my absence from or only intermittent appearance in this space for a little while."

It involved more than that. Peter Utley died some weeks later of cancer, aged 67, mourned as much as any journalist that I can remember. In his last days, or his last years, those final ironies of the conquest of Thatcherism cannot have been lost on him.

Ah, Calcutta!

By Carolyne Wright

ALTHOUGH I CAME to India on an Indo-US Subcommission Fellowship, with a project ("The Study and Translation of Work by Bengali Woman Poets and Writers") that sounded clearly defined, I had no idea what I would actually be able to accomplish. The requisite tourist visits included the day tour to Agra and the Taj Mahal; the boat ride on the Ganges past the bathing and cremation *ghats* of Benares; the trips to the majestic ruined hulk of the Sun Temple of Konarak in Orissa, and the immense Red Fort in Delhi, with the famous verse inscription by the Persian court poet Mirza Ghalib:

> *If there is a paradise on earth,*
> *It is this, it is this, it is this.*

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But my interest has been less in India's monuments than in its people.

Assigned to Calcutta by the Indian government's selection committee, I read some of the standard texts beforehand—Clark Blaise's and Bharati Mukherjee's *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, Geoffrey Moorhouse's *Calcutta*, and, of course, *The City of Joy* by Dominique La Pierre. Calcutta's poverty has always filled Westerners who have never visited the city with fascinated horror. It can indeed be an uncomfortable, unhealthy, and dangerous city; but it is also one of the most colourful and lively on the planet.

The much-publicised human rickshaws are here; the perilously over-overcrowded trams and buses during the office rush hours; the lorries belching evil, stinking exhaust in a city with no pollution controls whatever; the pot-holes and unbarricaded sewer and telephone repair trenches that turn streets into impassable construction sites for weeks on end. There is a *bustee*, a shanty town, only a few blocks from where I live in South Calcutta—a village of small huts, transported as it were to the city, inhabited by refugees from rural Bangladesh and West Bengal who have built dwellings for themselves from the materials they know and can easily procure. There are cows and goats wandering in the streets, browsing off vegetable refuse in the gutters and garbage dumps. There are ragged children, old women, and an occasional leper begging on the pavements. This is everyday life, even in my comparatively affluent neighbourhood.

Yet, in terms of the arts, Calcutta is a world-class city. Every evening there are recitals of Indian classical music and dance, theatre productions (in Bengali, Hindi, or English), films, poetry readings, lectures and other events in spacious modern theatres such as Rabindra Sadan, Nandan, or Kala Mandir. There are foreign films and visiting writers, professors, and media figures at the foreign cultural missions—the Alliance Française, British Council, Max Mueller Bhavan, USIS, and even Gorky Sadan, the Soviet cultural house. Innumerable private performances take place in middle- and upper-class homes, and street events proliferate—*pujas* at corner temples or thatched *pandal* booths, wedding and funeral processions, political demonstrations, and street theatre. It is appropriate that of the three goddesses who preside over this city, the third (after the fearsome crusader Durga and the bloodthirsty Kali) is Saraswati, patroness of learning and the arts, whose festival is celebrated in late January or early February, at the height of the cultural season.

Any survey of Calcutta's literary life has to begin with College Street, the publishers' and booksellers' district that grew up among the crumbling ancestral mansions near the original main campus of Calcutta University. All the principal publishers (Bengali, English, Hindi and Sanskrit) maintain editorial offices and retail outlets here, in the cramped book-lined rooms of dilapidated Victorian buildings, their entrances barely visible from pavements crowded with jerry-built bookstalls and obstructed by book and magazine vendors. This is the Mecca for students in search of scarce and often out-of-print textbooks; and also for the serious literary browser, who may be invited by the sales clerks to see additional stock in the *godown* (warehouse)—which usually means climbing up a shaky iron shipboard-style circular staircase to more floors of shelf-lined rooms. The famous Coffee House is here, too, where Bengali writers and intellectuals have traditionally met for hours of *adda*, literary discussions and gossip.

The biggest literary events of the year, however, occur when College Street moves to the Maidan exhibition grounds in January and February, for the West Bengal and Calcutta Book Fairs. The West Bengal Book Fair is geared for librarians, who make their year's purchases here with funds from state and central government grants. But the Calcutta Book Fair, whose 16th session it is this year, is now Asia's largest bookselling fair, and a bookbuyer's paradise. Over 400 booksellers, commercial and institutional publishers, as well as a growing number of foreign publishers—mostly from Britain, the USA, and the USSR—display and sell here. Among the honoured guests at a recent Book Fair were Peter Weidhaas, Director of the Frankfurt Book Fair, and Peter Mayer, Chief Executive of Penguin Books, who delivered the keynote address on the development of "International Publishing" and its effect on India, a nation which publishes literature in at least 16 regional languages, but which is also the world's third largest publisher of books in English, after Britain and the United States.

DESPITE THIS increasing international presence, the Calcutta Book Fair retains a distinctly Bengali ambience, evident not only in the Bengali script on placards and book jackets, the scraps of conversation overheard from strolling families and groups of students, the women in *saris* and men in *dhotis* or *kurta-pajama*, but also in the *Rabindra-sangeet* and *Nazrul-geeti*, the songs of Tagore and Nazrul Islam played over the public-address system. The vitality of Bengali literature is in no way diminished, either, judging from the crowds in the exhibits of Ananda, Dey's, M. C. Sarkar, and others of the larger and more prestigious editorial houses. These publishers time the appearance of new titles for the Book Fair; and sometimes two or three printings of a popular author's book will sell out in the fair's ten-day course.

The recent exposure to global markets, especially at events such as the Symposium on Indian Literature at the 1986 Frankfurt Book Fair, to which a number of Bengali writers were invited, has also focused attention on book production and distribution—which have not always done justice to the best work being written by Indian authors in the various regional languages. Bengali readers, at least, have begun to call for books to be printed in larger editions which meet international standards of attractiveness and durability, and can be made more readily available both at home and abroad—to the millions of "expatriate" Bengalis who are eager to keep in touch with the best literature produced in their own language.

WHATEVER DIFFICULTIES publishing in India faces, there is no doubt that Bengali as a literary culture is flourishing. There were, according to the latest census, 3,957,486 poets in Bengal—almost 40 *lakhs*, as a writer friend quipped. Little magazines abound, each supported by its group of devoted writer-members, who often

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pay production costs from their own pockets. The dozen or so "established" newspapers and magazines—such as *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, *Bartaman*, *Desh*, and *Jugantar*—regularly print poems and stories, and also a special "*Puja* Number" for the Durga *Puja* season each autumn. These are hefty, telephone-directory-sized volumes that keep Bengal's better-known writers scribbling feverishly for months, churning out poems, stories, essays and even full-length novels to meet the deadlines. Publishing's biggest plum is *Desh*, the *New Yorker* of Bengali magazines; to have the poetry editor ask to see a few of one's poems is, for the young poet, to glimpse vistas of untold glory—or at least a guaranteed literary future. The small magazines also publish their contributors' books, and young writers often come to the attention of the larger journals thereby. But there is a sizeable "anti-Establishment" contingent, opposed to the commercialism and patronage of the big-name writers. Members of these groups often refuse to send their work to mainstream publishers, and thus keep some of the most vigorous new writing out of reach of the larger reading public.

Besides the annual book fairs, Calcutta hosts other large-scale events—among them the Kabita Utsav, the All-India Poetry Festival held in January 1987, which featured talks, seminars, exhibits and readings by poets from most of the major languages, including English. These took place in different venues—Nandan (the West Bengal Film Society auditorium), the National Library, and at Viswa Bharati, the university started by Rabindranath Tagore in his ancestral village of Shantiniketan, two hours north of Calcutta by train. Since 1986-87 marked the 125th anniversary of the birth of this Nobel laureate and giant of Bengali letters, the state government sponsored a year-long programme of lectures, play performances, painting exhibitions, and concerts of the ever-popular *Rabindra-sangeet*, for which Tagore composed both lyrics and music. These functions were held at Calcutta's many literary and cultural institutions—the 95-year-old Bangiya Sahitya Parishad (Bengali Literary Society), the newer Pashchimbanga Bangla Akademi (West Bengal Bengali Academy), the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, the Bharatiya Bhasha Parishad (Society of Indian Languages), and the formidable Sahitya Akademi (roughly equivalent to the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters), based in Delhi but with a branch in Calcutta.

These organisations maintain libraries, sponsor research and much-needed translation projects from various regional languages into others, and publish literary and academic books—filling vital needs in a city with over-crowded universities and colleges, and no free public library system. The Bharatiya Bhasha Parishad and Sahitya Akademi confer some of the national book awards; the West Bengal government awards the Rabindra Puraskar, the coveted Rabindranath Tagore prize, for the year's best book in Bengali or on a Bengali subject. In January 1988, the Sahitya Akademi held a week-long conference on literary translation at the Salt Lake Stadium, inviting writers, translators, Indologists, and literary scholars from several countries to speak on the subject—an inescapable issue in a nation with so many regional literatures.

Short-term visitors to Calcutta may well miss all this activity. Some will do no more than find their way, duly follow-

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ing the directions in their Lonely Planet, Fodor's, or other traveller's guides, to the Oxford and Cambridge bookstores on genteely dilapidated Park Street, the area in which tourists tend to concentrate. A few will venture around the corner to Free School (now Mirza Ghalib) Street, to Seagull Books, housed on the third floor of an industrial and office building above a Dunlop Tyre showroom—if they happen to notice the placard on the wall by the stairwell entrance as they step gingerly, heckled by rickshaw pullers and troupes of Rajasthani women beggars, along the narrow rubble-strewn footpath between trenches dug for telephone cable repair.

Notwithstanding its lack of commercial visibility, Seagull's small shop contains the best selection of English-language books on a variety of subjects in the city. (One grumpy Calcutta journalist labelled it "a speciality shop [which] has built up a highbrow clientèle by importing books on such subjects as feminism, sociology and semiotics".) Seagull Press, its publishing arm, is bringing out innovative (and attractively produced) works on theatre and film, including a series of film-scripts translated into English, from such directors as Satyajit Ray and Shyam Benegal. Seagull acts as distributor in India for a number of British publishers; and an American visitor will be pleased to note copies of titles from Graywolf, Persea, and Black Sparrow on the shelves. Another shop on a shoestring budget is Classic Books, set back on a large grassy plot on Middleton Street, overshadowed by high-rise office towers and decaying mansions. With their application for a stall at the Book Fair denied year after year, Classic's owners decided in 1988 to hold their own Alternative Book Fair, which ran for a week in January and featured poetry readings, short plays, and concerts of the *bauls*, Bengal's renowned sect of devotional folk-musicians.

No overview of Calcutta's literary life would be complete without a visit to the suburban Lake Gardens home of Professor P. Lal, poet, teacher, translator, publisher and founder of the now 30-year-old Writers Workshop, featured a few years ago in "The Empire Strikes Back", the Indian episode in the BBC's *The Story of English* series. Started in 1958 to provide a forum and a publication outlet for Indian poetry (and some fiction, drama, and criticism) written in English, the Workshop has weathered censure from various quarters for being too eclectic, for publishing anybody with a manuscript, and even for aiding and abetting literary expression in English in post-colonial India. But the urbane and gentlemanly Lal asserts that none of these ungenerous comments matters: to date, the Workshop has brought out over 900 titles on local, "Gutenberg-era" hand-presses, giving employment to whole families of printers and bookbinders. These volumes, distinctive for their covers made from bright handloom saris ("You can recognise a Writers Workshop book a mile off", Lal says), have found their way to bookstores, libraries and university classrooms around the world. Although many Workshop authors are "one-book" writers, others such as Agha Shahid Ali, Nissim Ezekiel, and Vikram Seth (interviews with Seth never mention this) published their first books here.

The inescapable fact of multilingualism makes good translation—from one regional language to another, and from these to English—a *sine qua non* of the Indian publishing world.[1] Although the official wish is for Hindi to be the universal second language for inter-regional communications, this policy is offensive to the Dravidian-based language speakers of the south; and English remains *de facto* the *lingua franca* of the educated reading public from almost all regions. Most translations into English within India, though, are made not by native English speakers who are fluent in, say, Bengali or Tamil or Urdu, but by native Urdu, Tamil, or Bengali speakers who have learned English in school, and have little familiarity with its contemporary spoken forms. Such translations too often read like translations: lines of poetry are awkward (though the meanings are correctly rendered from the original): dialogue is stiff, bookish, and formal. Whatever grace or colloquial ease the original work possessed is not carried over into English.

More and more it seems that collaborative translation is the only viable option when there are so few native English speakers (whether of Indian or European origin) who are not only committed to literary translation but also fluent enough in any language of the Subcontinent to do these translations independently. Nor is there any financial incentive, unless one receives a Fellowship (not many of these available from within India) or is commissioned by a publisher for a specific assignment.

Being fortunate in both respects, I have spent much time contacting and interviewing Calcutta literary people; obtaining names and addresses of women writers and poets as well as of prospective translators; making appointments by letter or telephone, and then meeting them to explain my project of a Bengali anthology, and acquire copies of their books and other writings.

Such a degree of involvement and acquaintanceship can be useful: if the telephones aren't working or I don't have a writer's address, someone I am interviewing or translating with always knows someone else who lives in the same building as the writer, or is herself a cousin of that writer's younger brother's wife. The extended-family network can get the messages passed along, but it can also be claustrophobic: I have heard tales of scandals and fallings-out that happened years ago; the nuances are still discussed with relish, and the participants are still unable to live down their actions or the reputations justly or unjustly acquired thereby.)

Later, I sit down with co-translators to go over the first rough drafts in English and compare them word-for-word with the Bengali originals; then I work alone with these drafts, the originals, and the Bengali-English dictionary to make my own versions in contemporary (more-or-less American) English. I then again meet the co-translators (and the writers and poets themselves, if their English is good enough and they wish to participate to such a degree), to correct my tentative final version—which I then type and put in my ever-fattening files.

[1] See, in Encounter, July-August 1989, Sarvepalli Gopal, "Of Skylarks & Shirting: The English Language in India".

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A Special Book Section

Biography & Memoirs

Dark Corners

On Poetry & Melancholy—By STEPHEN WILSON

SYLVIA PLATH'S LAST POEM is terrifyingly beautiful. Written just one week before she took her life, "Edge" is a consummate work of art, and yet it is all wrong (if a poem can be wrong).[1] The heart cries out against it—auguring, as it does, the death of the poet, not only in art but in reality. Some dreadful confusion has clearly taken place.

The woman is perfected.
Her dead

Body wears the smile of accomplishment,
The illusion of a Greek necessity

Flows in the scrolls of her toga,
Her bare

Feet seem to be saying:
We have come so far, it is over.

Each dead child coiled, a white serpent,
One at each little

Pitcher of milk, now empty.
She has folded

Them back into her body as petals
Of a rose close when the garden

Stiffens and odors bleed
From the sweet, deep throats of the night flower.

The moon has nothing to be sad about,
Staring from her hood of bone.

She is used to this sort of thing.
Her blacks crackle and drag.

The empty pitchers of milk, redolent of Plath's own dried-up breasts, were transformed on the night of her suicide into full cups of milk which she left out for the children; the scrolls of the toga became towels and cloths, mercifully stuffed under their bedroom door to save them from the gas. A devastating, twisted logic—as David Holbrook demonstrates[2]—allowed her to act:

> "She was anxious that her children should have their drinks next morning. A parallel anxiety did not stop her from orphaning them."

Would that the tragic "necessity" for her own death had remained an illusion.

If Sylvia Plath were alive today, she would be a woman of 57, continuing no doubt to enrich our lives with her work. Instead, her sadly abbreviated life is somehow fixed in our minds, infinitely rehearsing and repeating the suicidal act. However, when Philip Larkin suggested that the value of her work depends on ". . . how highly we rank the expression of experience with which we can in no sense identify, and from which we can only turn in shock and sorrow",[3] he was surely mistaken, seeking perhaps to distance himself and the reader from the full horror of its implications.

Far from being strangely removed from everyday experience, Plath's work accurately evokes a universal caesura in the human condition. It is for this reason that her posthumous fame has never ceased to grow, generating numerous studies and, more recently, two major biographical attempts. In the latest of these, *Bitter Fame*,[4] Anne Stevenson writes:

> ". . . many people, especially women, discovered in her work a shocking revelation of extremist elements in their own psyches. Plath became a spokeswoman for the angry, the disillusioned, the bewildered generations of the 1960s and 1970s. The tragedy of her suicide and the power of her last poems seemed to sweep the polarities of life and art (carefully separated by T. S. Eliot and the New

[1] "Edge" is quoted from Sylvia Plath, *Collected Poems* (Faber & Faber, © Ted Hughes 1965 and 1981), by permission of Olwyn Hughes.
[2] David Holbrook, *Sylvia Plath: Poetry and Existence* (Athlone Press, 1988), p. 277.
[3] Philip Larkin, *Required Writing* (Faber & Faber, 1983).
[4] *Bitter Fame: A Life of Sylvia Plath*. By ANNE STEVENSON. Viking, £15.95.

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> Critics) into one unanswerably dramatic gesture of female defiance: 'The blood jet is poetry,/There is no stopping it'."

In the years after her death a feminist myth took shape which portrayed Sylvia Plath, not as the victim of a lost inner struggle, but as a sacrifice on the altar of masculine narcissism (her gravestone, bearing her married name, has been desecrated by vandals). It is part of Anne Stevenson's purpose, with the blessing of the Plath Estate, to explode the myth and replace it with an objective account. But such explosions, though planned, are always in danger of becoming uncontrolled.

LINDA WAGNER-MARTIN's *Sylvia Plath: A Biography*[5] erred in failing to confront this myth, but at least it avoided the oversimplified and contradictory reductivism of Anne Stevenson's supposed insights. In *Bitter Fame* we are told, for instance, that the unseen menace that haunts nearly everything that Plath wrote is attributable to her having undergone electro-convulsive therapy in 1959; and conversely that her lack of progress following admission to McLean Hospital was halted by a short course of ECT, to which she had a positive reaction. Stevenson forgets that Plath was taking sleeping pills routinely at the age of fourteen, and that her suicidal impulses antedated her contact with the psychiatrists. Indeed, it was an episode of self-mutilation that precipitated the original referral. Above all, Anne Stevenson overlooks the "menace" so obviously present in the "Juvenilia", all written before 1956. One example will suffice:[6]

> *Like a diver on a lofty spar of land*
> *Atop the flight of stairs I stand.*
> *A whirlpool leers at me,*
> *Absorbent sponge;*
> *I cast off my identity*
> *And make the fatal plunge.*

Something unseemly has crept into *Bitter Fame*—almost, one senses, against its author's better judgment. As A. Alvarez has commented:

> "In more than 350 pages of disparagement, nothing is said of Plath's charm, which was considerable, or of her quizzical intelligence and profound love of poetry, or of her courage and resilience in her last ghastly months."[7]

In an effort to score "objective" psychological points and expose the "underlying true self" of her subject, Stevenson is carried away by the injurious accounts of a few informants, and seems to achieve merely an extraordinary lack of compassion. During her first attempt at love-making, Sylvia Plath, according to a friend, was unfortunate enough to sustain a vaginal tear which continued to haemorrhage on the following day. Anne Stevenson's description continues:

> "Though shaken herself, Nancy was surprised by the force of Sylvia's terror. As she lay in a pool of blood on the bathroom floor, fear invaded the room 'like a third person'. When the mantle of self-possession fell apart, 'all the stored-up fear and vulnerability came pouring out in a confusing helter-skelter of words and sobs'."

To be sure, one needs no secret store of fear and vulnerability to be terrified in such circumstances, yet Anne Stevenson offers the account in evidence of Plath's underlying mental instability. Her tone here acquires a harsh and spurious "objectivity" which ill becomes a biographer.

Of course, a poet may be uncomfortable with investigative work. Stevenson's own poem, "Hot Wind, Hard Rain",[8] dedicated to Sylvia Plath, contains the following lines:

> *Hot winds bring on hard rain, and here in Durham*
> *a downpour tonight will probably allay*
> *Whatever has got the willows by the hair,*
> *Shoving light under their leaves*
> *like an indecent surgeon.*

This is not to say that "the all-American-girl" revealed by Plath's mother in *Letters Home*[9] and "the precarious narcissist" of *Bitter Fame* never existed, rather that these were not polarities between false and true selves, but alternative states of mind in a complex kaleidoscope of identity. To confuse inner and outer worlds and mistake the part for the whole is to commit the same error that Plath fell into.

ANNE STEVENSON's biggest mistake is to set Sylvia Plath's interior life in a seemingly unfamiliar and alien world. Plath's poetry, rather than casting light on psychological processes to which we are all in some degree vulnerable, is made to reflect only her inaccessible mental aberration. Whether or not "Event" and "The Rabbit Catcher" were set off by an upsurge of pathological jealousy, the poems give no grounds for concluding that:

> "[Sylvia Plath] was making her self-justifying and unforgiving case in much the same terms as henceforth she would use to sow 'the seeds of the myth of her martyrdom' in presenting her situation to friends and to her mother. In this concept she herself appears guiltless; her children are used to substantiate her role. Her husband is demeaned and blamed. . . ."

On the contrary, the voice of "Event" is non-judgmental, perplexed, descriptive. It brings together both partners in the grip of a force perceived as greater than themselves, bewildered by the power of un-love.

> *Where apple bloom ices the night*
> *I walk in a ring,*
> *A groove of old faults, deep and bitter.*

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[5] *Sylvia Plath: A Life*. By LINDA WAGNER-MARTIN. Chatto & Windus, £14.95. See also *Sylvia Plath: The Critical Heritage*. Edited by LINDA WAGNER-MARTIN. Routledge, £40.00.

[6] "Family Reunion", in Sylvia Plath, *Collected Poems* (1981).

[7] A. Alvarez, "A Poet and Her Myths", in *The New York Review of Books*, 28 September 1989.

[8] Anne Stevenson, "Hot Wind, Hard Rain", in *Poetry Review*, vol. 79, no. 2, Summer 1989.

[9] A. S. Plath, *Sylvia Plath: Letters Home* (Faber and Faber, 1976).

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Love cannot come here.
A black gap discloses itself.
On the opposite lip

A small white soul is waving, a small white maggot.
My limbs, also, have left me.
Who has dismembered us?

The dark is melting. We touch like cripples.

Precisely because Plath's poetry invariably attains this integrity, so accurately and unflinchingly charts the inner happenings, we are taken aback by her capacity for confusion in the outer world. She reverses the expected state of affairs. It is as if she could see clearly in one direction only—inwards—while apprehending the outer world through some distorting opacity.

IS THIS THE TRIBUTE that poetry exacts? Perhaps confusion between internal and external reality and vulnerability to melancholia is an occupational hazard for poets. Certainly Jeremy Reed in *Madness the Price of Poetry*[10] sees poetic activity as inherently dangerous:

> ". . . the risk involved in writing poetry is the risk of the migrant bird on a stormy night. Either we navigate a return journey around a focal beacon of inner space, or like the shearwater we stun ourselves against a lighthouse cupola, and must depend on the lighthouse man to throw us back into the air."

The poet in his exploration of inner space is forever in danger of finding himself unable to return. Reed's empathic study gathers together essays on a gallery of poets, ranging from John Clare and Christopher Smart to Robert Lowell, Theodore Roethke, and Hart Crane. Lush with tropes and conceits, the book is a poem in its own right. While Gerard Manley Hopkins's contemporaries ". . . nosed downstream into oblivion, he forced himself against the current. He was a salmon migrating upstream . . . ." Baudelaire was "a man who lived in a mirror"; a Lowell poem ". . . stands out like the triangular dorsal fin of a shark cutting the surface of blue inshore waters".

Hopkins was subject to melancholy all his life, but the year 1885, when he was lecturing on Classics at University College, Dublin, appears to have marked his lowest ebb. "When I am at the worst", he wrote to Alexander Baillie, "though my judgment is never affected, my state is much like madness." In this he was certainly correct, for no matter how deep his depression, Hopkins's grasp on reality never faltered. The predominant emotion in his poems is unquestionably awe; he is only too aware of the "otherness" of the natural world. In contrast to Sylvia Plath, there is no hint of romantic fusion in his vision of death:

O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
Frightful, sheer, no man fathomed. Hold them cheap
May who ne'er hung there. Nor does long our small
Durance deal with that steep or deep. Here! creep
Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all
Life death does end and each day dies with sleep.

Rainer Maria Rilke, too, endured periods of profound depression; and his suffering and fear of poetic sterility are expressed in strikingly similar tones:[11]

Tears will not let me speak.
My death, blackamoor, heart-keeper!
tip me down deeper, steeper,
pour them off. For I want to speak.

Giant black heart-holder, would in the end,
because I'd spoken,
silence even then have been broken?

Rock me, old friend!

The image of the inexpressible abyss, the spectre of falling into and being engulfed by emptiness haunts these poets. "What if the voice never returns", says Jeremy Reed, "or falls short of work already completed? This is the poet's constant anxiety; he may become an empty vessel. . . ."

Sylvia Plath seems to confront this kind of anxiety headlong. Perpetually tempted by the oceanic urge, she is ready to fling herself into emptiness like a free-fall parachutist:[12]

I didn't want any flowers, I only wanted
To lie with my hands turned up and be utterly empty.
How free it is, you have no idea how free—

PLATH ATTENDED Robert Lowell's writing seminar at Boston University in 1959, and in an acerbic memoir appended to Anne Stevenson's biography Dido Merwin suggests that the two poets had more than a little in common: "The pattern of their public scenes was remarkably similar except that he used words like a Tommy gun whereas she used silence like nerve gas." Their private scenes, too, were not unalike: compare Plath's

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[10] *Madness the Price of Poetry*. By JEREMY REED. Peter Owen, £15.95.
[11] "Autumn 1913" from *Poems to Night*, in Rainer Maria Rilke, *Selected Works*, tr. J. B. Leishman (Hogarth Press, 1967).
[12] "Tulips", in Sylvia Plath, *Collected Poems*, p. 61.

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Now the room is ahiss. The instrument
Withdraws its tentacle.
But the spawn percolate in my heart . . .

with Lowell's

I nursed my last clear breath of oxygen,
there, waiting for the chandelier to fall,
tentacles clawing for my jugular.[13]

What function does poetry serve for the poet? Lowell came to question whether his method of composition was "a death-rope or a lifeline". Jeremy Reed sees it as unquestionably the latter, but in Plath's case the answer is not so clear. Although writing appeared to make her happy—transforming hurt and beauty into words, as she put it in her Summer 1950 journal[14]—it may also have contributed to her death. For artistic expression, as A. Alvarez has pointed out, is not always therapeutic; the artist does not necessarily enjoy some kind of cathartic relief:

> "Instead, by some perverse logic of creation, the act of formal expression may simply make the dredged-up material more readily available to him. The result of handling it in his work may well be that he finds himself living it out."[15]

Jeremy Reed concludes that a poet's only biographer is his double: "It is what happens in the dark corners, in the hours when one is unrestrainably alone, that comprises the record of one's life." Sylvia Plath has left us a graphic account of those dark places.

[13] "Words Heard by Accident, Over the Phone", in Sylvia Plath, *Collected Poems*, p. 202; Robert Lowell, "The Severed Head", quoted by Jeremy Reed in *Madness the Price of Poetry*, p. 101.
[14] See Linda Wagner-Martin, *Sylvia Plath: A Biography*, p. 55.
[15] A. Alvarez, *The Savage God* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971), p. 32.

Lord Byron: Dramaturg

"The Arbiter of Others' Fate"—By RICHARD LANSDOWN

On 11 May 1815, one friend of Lord Byron's, Douglas Kinnaird, wrote to another, John Cam Hobhouse, then in Paris. "I write this", Kinnaird began, "to anticipate your gratulatory epistle on my elevation into the Committee of management of a *real play house*—*your* cautious disposition will dispose you to cry out against the folly of exposing myself to be shot at by every ill-natur'd fellow that visits London for the Holydays—What will you say to me for drawing our friend Byron into the same situation? Scarcely out of his Hebrew scrape[1] 'ere I get him well into this—Well Sir, the Lord is delighted with his office, and will, I think, fill it nobly—I am not sure that he feels the full weight of the responsibility as much as I do—But there was no alternative between letting the Theatre and coming forward boldly to serve and I hope *preserve* it—If you do not forthwith write a play for us, we fully expect you will send us over any light French after-pieces, and operas (new ones) which wd do well to translate—if you stay in Paris, you might employ a leisure hour of your evening in visiting the Theatres with such a view."[2]

Byron and Kinnaird had become members of the management subcommittee of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, on which subcommittee Byron was to serve until the scandal surrounding his separation from his wife drove him out of England for ever. Relatively little is known about Byron's brief period of service in the English theatre. The minutes that this subcommittee must surely have kept (along with other records of Drury Lane) appear to have been lost during the Blitz, but the outline of its function—and of Byron's function within it—can be traced in published sources like Leslie Marchand's biography of the poet, and his monumental edition of Byron's letters.[3] In the course of my own researches into Byron's historical dramas, however, I have found some additional material at the British Library, and also in the Byron archive at the offices of John Murray, Publishers, of Albemarle Street ("Drury Lane" folder). Through the letters Byron received and kept, we can glimpse the theatrical world of the Regency and the elements of which it was composed. In the main, it must be said, those elements were venality and self-delusion.

The Theatre Royal had burned down in February 1809, and its owner, the playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan, had proved incapable of rebuilding it. That responsibility was eventually undertaken by a joint-stock company—the first in English theatre—under the chairmanship of the Whig politician and brewer Samuel Whitbread II. The Drury Lane

[1] Byron's collection of poems, *Hebrew Melodies*, had been published in April, with Kinnaird's encouragement.
[2] The Broughton Papers. British Library Additional MS, 47224 ff. 3-4.
[3] Leslie Marchand, ed., *Byron's Letters and Journals*, 12 vols (John Murray, 1973-82); *Byron: A Portrait* (John Murray, 1971).

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Company of Proprietors, founded in June 1810, went on to raise £300,000 by an issue of shares, and reopened the theatre on the night of 10 October 1812.[4] Byron wrote a rather stilted poetical "Address" to mark the occasion.

That this great theatre should be run along joint-stock lines, with a management subcommittee reporting to a main committee of proprietors, was an unfamiliar enough idea in Regency London. That both these committees, and the enterprise as a whole, should have a distinctly Whiggish political cast, attracted a fair amount of adverse comment in the newspapers, broadsheets, and cartoons of the day. Whitbread and his supporters on the main committee spoke openly—in reports published by the Company—of Drury Lane as a "*National* object" and as a "*National* theatre". By this they meant a theatre in which the English dramatic heritage would be protected against both the "German" melodramas of Kotzebue *et al.*, and the excesses of the unlicensed, "illegitimate" stage: child actors, performing dogs, elephants, horses, etc., etc. However, in so far as the Theatre promulgated these ideas, and sought to associate its cultural refinement with a Whig Party hungry for political advantage, it brought upon itself the unfriendly attention of Party critics. Tory journalists and cartoonists tended either to attribute cultural pretensions to Whitbread and his colleagues, which they then proceeded to deflate, or to allow the accusation to gather weight that Whitbread planned, through his "national theatre", to inculcate Bonapartism and to criticise the government during a period of crisis. The main committee's published report of 11 April 1812 spoke of "open hostility" and "secret enmity" being shown towards the concern.

This hostility might not have mattered, except that Whitbread's Drury Lane proved to be a commercial failure. Takings for the 1812-13 season were £80,000; those for 1817-18 were £43,000. Eventually, in 1819, the management subcommittee resigned, and the theatre was leased to the successful actor-manager Robert Elliston. Eight years later, Elliston himself went bankrupt.

BACK IN 1815, however, the committee system still had many supporters, though Whitbread was no longer one of them. It was he who had suggested, at a general meeting held at the Crown and Anchor Tavern on 3 May of that year, that Drury Lane be leased out to a professional manager; and in response to this suggestion Douglas Kinnaird acted (as he felt) to save the Theatre as a national concern. A week later, on 10 May, a further meeting was held to debate Whitbread's proposition. Kinnaird opposed what he called this "sordid speculation". Furthermore, Kinnaird,

> ". . . adverting to a change in the management, stated, that he was authorised to name a Noble Lord as willing to be one of the [Sub-] Committee. The talent and great genius of Lord Byron made him peculiarly fit for the concern, and no doubt could be entertained by the subscribers that the assistance of the Noble Lord would be a tower of strength."[5]

Whitbread, thoroughly out-manoeuvred, was forced to agree. He suggested that Byron, Kinnaird, and the Whig MP Peter Moore form the nucleus of the new management subcommittee, which was elected yearly, and consisted of five members. Though one Sir Thomas Turton doggedly insisted that the theatre be leased—and supported the "gratifying of the public taste by the introduction of quadrupeds" if need be—the motion was carried by an overwhelming majority.

One newspaper at least, was pleased with Byron's appointment, and clearly sympathetic to Kinnaird's point of view. *The Champion* for Sunday, 14 May 1815, reported his election as follows:

> "That which has been conceded to the Theatre [i.e. monopoly status], whether wisely or not, has been afforded for the sake of supporting a rational and elegant amusement, and to enable the managers to resist the demands of vulgarity or popular caprice, and to consult only the interests of good taste, and the reputation of the country."

The election of Byron to the subcommittee, the paper felt, would guarantee the maintenance of these high standards:

> "The report that Lord Byron may be concerned, is a very pleasant one, for his Lordship's literary reputation is a pledge to the public, that literary talent would not be considered by him, as it is by others, quite subordinate to the talents of an instructor of animals, and the maker of fireworks."[6]

The idea of Byron defending the reputation of his country—if only its theatrical reputation—is a novel one, even to us, nearly 200 years after the event. A year after this report, Byron's reputation had taken on an entirely different colour. His wife, the former Isabella Milbanke—whom he had married on 2 January 1815—in fact disapproved of the Theatre from the very start. She wrote to her father on 15 September:

> "Drury Lane opens on Saturday—I don't much like the concern, and I believe it is the general sentiment, as far as regards B's share of it. Lady Hardwicke told me it was only fit for *a six and eight penny man*, and it seems to involve a species of business and attendance which I did not at all foresee. In short it is the vocation of an *Acting* Manager—to superintend candle-snuffers, lecture performers, &c &c."[7]

Byron had many reasons, not altogether of the best kind, for accepting his friend's suggestion that he serve at Drury Lane. Some of those reasons may have been whimsical ones, but it is inconceivable—given the intensity of public conten-

[4] Together with Covent Garden, Drury Lane had held a monopoly over conventional dramatic representation in London since the Restoration in 1660. This monopoly was eventually abolished in 1843.

[5] A Collection of Memoranda, Documents, Playbills, Newspaper Cuttings, etc. Relating to Drury Lane Theatre . . . arranged by James Winston. Box for 1815-16. British Library.

[6] A Collection of Cuttings from Newspapers and Periodicals Relating to Lord Byron 1812-1880, ed. Thomas J. Wise. British Library.

[7] Quoted by Malcolm Elwin, *Lord Byron's Wife* (1962), p. 318.

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tion over the direction of the Theatre, and Byron's association with some of those involved in its management—that Byron did not know that he was engaging himself with a financially and politically embattled institution. He must have known, too, that he was joining a subcommittee which had been reorganised precisely to prevent a sliding-away on the part of the management from the cultural, quasi-ideological ambitions it had initially proclaimed for itself. He was being asked not only to serve the theatre but, in Kinnaird's words, to "*preserve* it".

BYRON'S PRIMARY FUNCTION at Drury Lane was to encourage the writing and submission of new dramas. "How I wish", Mrs Siddons had once written, "that Somebody would write two or three good tragedies some wet afternoon."[8] If quantity had been any substitute for quality, she need not have worried. Drury Lane had a huge stock of playscripts, despite the conflagration of 1809: 176 were received at the theatre in the 1813-14 season alone. Byron— "in person and by proxy"—dutifully waded through nearly 500 such scripts. "I do not think", he wrote, "of those which I saw—there was one which could be conscientiously tolerated."

Byron's colleagues also had it in mind that he might persuade men like Thomas Campbell, Samuel Rogers, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Sir Walter Scott, and Thomas Moore to write for the theatre. He was the poet, after all. These too, the new member tried; but to no avail.

Finally, there were the new submissions, some of which, much to Byron's embarrassment, were delivered by hand:

> "Then the Scenes I had to go through!—the authors—and the authoresses—the Milliners—the wild Irishmen—the people from Brighton—from Blackwell—from Chatham—from Cheltenham—from Dublin—from Dundee—who came in upon me!—to all of whom it was proper to give a civil answer—and a hearing—and a reading. . . ."

Byron sent the most awkward and persistent cases "up to Douglas Kinnaird", who was "sufficiently ready with a negative" and relieved Byron of the task. The scripts kept arriving for all that; Sir James Bland Burges, Lady Byron's uncle by marriage, sent in "four tragedies and a farce", one or all of which Byron thought acceptable, but could not persuade the subcommittee to stage.[9] Thomas Sheldrake, a quack whom Byron had consulted about his lame foot, hoped, perhaps mistakenly, that his medical exertions on Byron's behalf might lead him to look kindly on a friend's play—the script was lost when Byron left England in 1816.[10]

On 20 July 1815, a writer "in the mystery of anonymous garb" (but hailing from Bath, according to the stamp) sent in a play "founded on Beaumont and Fletcher's Island Princess" which had the advantage, not only of being "in strict unison with the rules of the Drama", but also of requiring "no expensive scenery or decorations", as the "Indian paraphernalia" required for the production was "already to be found in the Theatre". The same author spoke, too, of the "consolation" due to "the insulted Muse"—insulted, that is, by neglect. Under "the fostering genius and patronage of your Lordship", he felt, "the candidates for public favour who can write regular Dramas are sure of a just decision"—which is probably what Byron gave him.

In another play Byron received, "the unities could not fail to be observed for the protagonist was chained by the leg to a pillar during the chief part of the performance". The play sounds no more ridiculous than the Regency average: at the conclusion, the would-be usurper of a peaceful kingdom makes one last attempt, during a royal visit to his cell, to stab the king with a knife; "but, finding himself at the end of his tether [i.e. his chain], he sticks it into his own carcass, and dies, saying he has fulfilled a prophecy".[11]

On 30 August 1815, W. Lingham, writing from Glasgow, sent another play—already performed at Edinburgh—for Byron's consideration. Should Byron find this "successful effort of my pen . . . worthy for Drury's boards", the author would thank him "to recommend it for representation". Needless to say, the play could be "brought out at very little expence"—which is surprising, for it was clearly not as simple as an adaptation from Beaumont & Fletcher: "The Procession in honor of the Woollen Manufactury" which constituted the climax of the production, "produced the happiest effect here—a similar procession was never attempted in Britain", the author concluded smugly.

BYRON'S FAME as a poet, it was hoped, would sway diffident playwrights in his favour. His fame attracted more than amateur dramatists, however. Persons of every kind, connected with Drury Lane or not, wrote to him with their suggestions, applications, appeals and demands for justice. Letter after letter makes reference to Byron's "kind disposition" and his "generous heart", or flatters him with "knowing something more of the drama, than a mere Mussulman". He was clearly a more attractive proposition where such correspondence was concerned than Peter Moore, for example, or Lord Essex, another member of the subcommittee. On 14 June 1815, one Ralph Wewitzer sent Byron a three-page letter concerning the historical solecisms and lapses of "continuity" which Drury Lane's haphazard stocks of costumes and scenery often visited on productions at the theatre.[12] Wewitzer wrote about an incongruity that must have been common at the time:

> "The different parts [of the set] . . . do not always correspond; the side wings being sometimes inapplicable to the body of the scene. The same inaccuracy not unfrequently occurs in respect to the decorations, furniture, utensils &c and above all the characteristic dresses of the Performers, especially in inferior parts of an historical play."

The remedy Wewitzer proposed for this problem was his "Chronological Statement" of "architecture, decorations,

[8] Quoted by Linda Kelly, *The Kemble Era* (1980), p. 116.
[9] *Byron's Letters and Journals*, vol. IX, pp. 35-36.
[10] Ernest J. Lovell, ed., *His Very Voice and Self: Collected Conversations of Lord Byron* (1954), p. 18.
[11] Murray MSS: Anon. *Byron's Letters and Journals*, vol. IX, p. 36; vol. IV, p. 323.
[12] Murray MSS: Lingham, Cazenove, Holland, Wewitzer.

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and costume", which listed plays by period and catalogued relevant illustrations of stage furnishing to prevent anachronisms. It was one of those schemes that is, at one and the same time, very sensible and totally impracticable, for all the author's claims that it was "material to the dignified management of our great National Theatre". Mr Wewitzer was ahead of his time. But the subcommittee on the other hand, as Byron well knew, had larger problems on its hands than those of continuity.

AT SOME TIME in July 1815, James Cazenove—whom Byron had met (and financially assisted) in Athens in 1811, when Cazenove and his brother were on the run from Napoleon—wrote to the new subcommittee member, asking for his help. A friend of his, a Miss Mortimer, was "very desirous of making some advantageous use of her vocal talents" and of taking part in "the future success of Drury Lane Theatre". Miss Mortimer, Cazenove wrote:

> ". . . feels herself quite confident of success, as during the last seven or eight years she has been acting Prima Donna at all the best theatres of Italy, and lastly at Palermo."

Byron replied on 23 July:

> "On receiving your letter I immediately mentioned Miss M. to the Managers & the Committee—but I am sorry to say that according to the present arrangements for the season there will be no vacant engagement."[13]

Cazenove had written from Old Broad Street in the City, as one gentleman asking a favour of another. Another of Byron's correspondents, Jane Scott, lived at 25 Old Compton Street in Soho, and took an altogether humbler line. Three of Mrs Scott's five daughters had been employed at Drury Lane, on Whitbread's recommendation, for the past three seasons: "Two of them were dancers the other was a Singer." Now, however, Whitbread was dead, having committed suicide on 6 July 1815:

> "I have just received their discharge from Mr Ward [secretary at Drury Lane] wherein he mentions there is such a considerable reduction made in the Theatre that it will not be in the power of the Committee to engage my daughters for the ensuing season."

The poor widow ("My husband was a Captain in the 83rd Regiment") was in desperate straits, and concluded her letter with barely concealed and unrehearsed hysteria:

> "For Heavens sake My Lord and have them reinstated or they will inevitably Perish and great will be your reward here and hereafter will ever be the Prayers of the most unfortunate but Grateful family on Earth. . . ."

On 26 July Byron wrote to secretary Ward:

> "I have received a letter from a Mrs. Scott written in very great apparent distress at the dismission of her daughters in ye course of our late retrenchments.—Her case seems a hard one. . . . Of this person and her family I know nothing except from her letter—nor have I any motive in this application in their favour. . . . I wish them to be replaced if it can be done without much inconvenience—and is not contrary to the will of my colleagues. . . ."

Ward replied the following day:

> "I have received your Lordships note in favor of the Miss Scotts. The Sub Committee are to meet tomorrow afternoon at two when I will lay it before them.—I hope your Lordship may find it convenient to attend. The causes of their dismissal were inattention & inefficiency."[14]

Most of the contents of Byron's theatrical mail-bag were neither so unintentionally amusing as Mr Wewitzer's letter nor so sad as Mrs Scott's. Many were appeals for employment in which the writer simply put his or her (mostly her) case in the most deserving or attractive light. All struggled with their bashfulness, or at length overcame their diffidence, as did the almost-anonymous "E. L.", who had been "encourag'd"—as had so many others—by Byron's "general Character for goodness of heart and Liberality of mind". She wrote on 22 September 1815:

> "I am my Lord a very *young* Female, and unfortunately an Orphan, a Widow, and a Mother, who having from infancy an inclination and some talents for the Stage which if Honour'd by your approbation might be the means of affording an Independence for myself and

[13] Murray MS: Cazenove. *Byron's Letters and Journals*, vol. IV, p. 305.
[14] Murray MS: Scott. *Byron's Letters and Journals*, vol. IV, p. 306. Murray MS: Ward.

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> Infant. Trusting that in the Characters of Desdemona—Belvidera—Juliet—Mrs Haller &cc—I could acquit myself to your sattisfaction should your Lordship favour me with an answer you will have the goodness to address E. L. to the care of Mr Harker Wax Chandler Fetter Lane Holborn."[15]

E. L.'s letter, coming as it does from a woman eager to stress both her youth and her lack of masculine "support", raises some questions. Were the young actresses who aspired to the boards of Drury Lane expected (either by themselves, or by others) to grant sexual favours to the great and the good who might place them there? Byron was accused, wrongly, of having an affair with Mrs Mardyn, an actress at Drury Lane, though he *did* have an affair with another actress, Susan Boyce.[16] Claire Clairmont—Mary Shelley's stepsister, and mother of Byron's illegitimate daughter Allegra—who was nothing if not ingenious, made her first approaches to Byron in March 1816, pretending to have ambitions for the stage. The evidence seems overwhelming: rumoured affairs, real affairs, sexual approaches disguised as professional ones, professional approaches garnished with sexual lures.

However, we should reflect very carefully on such evidence. The affair with Mrs Mardyn did not take place, and Susan Boyce was already a working actress at the theatre when her affair with Byron began. Nor did she make any professional gains from the liaison—quite the contrary. Equally, Claire Clairmont set out deliberately to capture Byron's interest, and was prepared to adopt any tactic to that end. We should remember, too, that E. L.'s (to modern eyes) ambiguous advertisement of her youth and independence may not have appeared as such in the more paternalistic days of the Regency. E. L. might have thought her letter an appeal for protection, not an incitement to sexual interest. Then again, she might not. In either case, E. L.'s letter suggests the kinds of tortuous—and possibly dangerous—manoeuvre which young women with ideas of popular success were more or less forced to undertake in attracting the interest of those who might make those ideas a reality. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.*

WHAT OF THE PLAYS themselves? If Byron could not find new dramas among either the professional or the amateur classes of playwright, what *was* presented at Drury Lane between 9 September 1815, when the season began, and 26 April 1816, when Byron left the country? Disappointed in his researches, Byron had resorted to writing a play himself. *Werner* was started at some point in the autumn of 1815, abandoned, and eventually completed years later in the winter of 1821-22. Byron later suggested that *Werner* had been set aside because "Lady Byron's farce [that is to say, her leaving him and suing for a separation] put it out of my head for the time of her representation". This may be true, but the separation also coincided with the arrival of *Bertram*, a tragedy by the impoverished Reverend Charles Robert Maturin, best known today for his gothic novel *Melmoth the Wanderer*. Byron seized on the play eagerly, stopped work on *Werner*, and presented *Bertram* to his colleagues on the subcommittee. They announced themselves "quite as ready and willing" as Byron was to see the play presented.[17]

Maturin's melodrama was first performed on 9 May 1816, and was a very palpable hit. It ran for 22 nights, and the text of the play went through seven editions—with John Murray, needless to say—before the end of the year. But other productions of the season ran, on average, for four nights apiece, and many were performed only once. A still more depressing statistic is the fact that *Bertram* was the only new play produced that season. Most of the productions were well past retirement age. Nineteen of the 35 plays performed between September and April were straightforward comedies, ranging from George Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer*, William Congreve's *Love for Love*, and a polite adaptation of William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* called *The Country Girl*, to Mrs Inchbald's *Lovers' Vows* (which was itself adapted from Kotzebue and was to be of such importance in *Mansfield Park*) and George Colman the younger's *John Bull* and *The Heir at Law*. Mrs Centlivre's *The Wonder* had been written in 1714, and her *The Busy Body* in 1709. Isaac Bickerstaffe's *Love in a Village* dated from 1762, Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *A Trip to Scarborough* from 1777, and Richard Cumberland's *The West Indian* from 1771. An adaptation of Molière's *Tartuffe* (called, unimaginatively, *The Hypocrite*) had been written in 1768. Nor were the tragedies or "serious" plays any fresher: Edward Young's reworking of *Othello—The Revenge*—dated from 1721; George Lillo's *The London Merchant* from 1731; Nicholas Rowe's *Tamerlane* from 1702. Philip Massinger's *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* was revived, as was his *The Duke of Milan*. Monk Lewis's *The Castle Spectre* was a mere stripling, being only eighteen years old in 1815.

Any space intervening between these tried-and-tested pieces was taken up with Shakespeare who, along with Massinger, provided Drury Lane's star attraction, Edmund Kean, with roles in which he could display his talents. Kean's first performance of the season was on 16 October, in *Richard III*. He then tore through *Othello*, *Richard II*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*—before the end of the month. This was no mean achievement, even in a repertory theatre such as Drury Lane. The standard of these productions can only be guessed at.

One new play—albeit a successful one—was all Byron could find for the subcommittee's "national theatre". (In fact he had found two; the other, *Ivan*, was written by "that wretched leper of literature—that *Itch* of Scribbling personified", William Sotheby.[18] Unfortunately, Sotheby withdrew his drama in a fit of pique, in the spring of 1816.) The rest of the season had been cobbled together from the most antique specimens of the English stage.

It must have been with some relief that Byron relinquished his responsibilities to the Theatre Royal. But he never resigned from the subcommittee, and remained—in

[15] Murray MS: E. L.

[16] Her story is told, and her letters to Byron are reprinted in George Paston's and Peter Quennell's *To Lord Byron* (1939).

[17] *Byron's Letters and Journals*, vol. VIII, p. 237; vol. V, p. 201.

[18] *Byron's Letters and Journals*, vol. VI, p. 33.

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theory at least—a member of it until a new subcommittee was elected in November 1816. By that time the "national theatre" enterprise, under this form of management, had been utterly discredited. In October a newspaper decided that the members selected so far had been

> ". . . so far elevated from the ordinary occupations of life, as to deprive them of the correct means of judging concerning the necessary qualifications for it. Poetic genius or senatorial eloquence are but ill-fitted to enforce the discipline of a stage or a green-room, and are in these places as far removed from their appropriate sphere of action, as the manager of a Theatre would be at a loss in the cabinet."

Byron, the journalist continued, "never once seems to have troubled himself about the matter, but has pursued and is still pursuing his studies and his amusements on the Continent".[19]

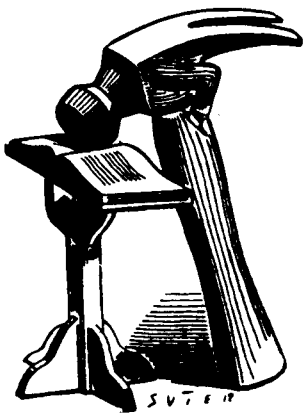
[19] Newspaper clipping, provenance unknown, in A Collection of Memoranda, Documents, Playbills, Newspaper Cuttings, etc. Relating to Drury Lane Theatre . . . arranged by James Winston. Box for 1815-16. British Library.

This is a rather harsh judgment. Byron had used his best efforts to obtain plays for the Theatre, and carried out as well as he could the thankless task of reading and, if need be, rejecting such plays. Equally, he appears to have handled enquiries and complaints sent to him personally with sympathy and tact. Nor did he put Drury Lane out of mind on finally leaving England on 26 April 1816. He enquired about the Theatre's progress repeatedly from Switzerland and from Venice; and in time, when he came to write his own dramas, memories of Drury Lane were very much with him. "I have had no view to the stage", he wrote, disingenuously, in his preface to *Marino Faliero* (1820), ". . . in its present state it is, perhaps, not a very exalted object of ambition; besides I have been too much behind the scenes to have thought it so at any time."

This, the modern literary historian might decide, amounts to the Regency stage exerting a negative influence over Byron's plays. A negative influence, however, is not the same as no influence at all, and a series of experiences as apparently bizarre and inconsequential as those I have described may well have contributed to that austere and uncompromising notion of the theatre that we find at work in Byron's unjustly neglected historical plays.

Two Historians

Arnold Toynbee & Lewis Namier—By MAX BELOFF



IT WAS IN 1920 that Lewis Namier lent Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* to Arnold Toynbee, and thus helped to crystallise in Toynbee's mind the theme of what was to become his life's work, *The Study of History*, of which he sketched the first outlines in 1921. And it is to the tracing of such influences upon Toynbee's intellectual development as well as the ramifications of Toynbee's fraught private and domestic life (explaining his constant hunger for praise and money) that the eminent American historian W. H. McNeill has devoted his utterly absorbing biography.[1]

Toynbee and Namier had been colleagues in the British delegation to the Paris Peace Conference when Toynbee—not yet convinced (as he was to become) of the irrelevance of Judaism, and not having yet developed the strong anti-Zionism of his subsequent years (culminating as we now learn in the sending of good wishes to a Syrian general at the time of the Yom Kippur war)—could join with Namier in advocating the cause of the Jewish National Home. The divergence in their subsequent paths does not seem to have given Toynbee any feeling of antipathy towards Namier—a common allegiance to Balliol College, Oxford, may have overcome the latent anti-Semitism into which Toynbee's anti-Zionism, as with other anti-Zionists, seems sometimes to have overflowed.

Indeed, Toynbee was to publish a rather affectionate tribute—"Sir Lewis Namier", in *Acquaintances* (1967)—emphasising his indebtedness to the young Namier for being made aware of Eastern Europe. Toynbee also gives an account of the transfer of Namier's allegiance, from strong support of Poland's claims, to Zionism and a strongly anti-Polish stance during the 1919 Peace Conference,[2] and reveals that Namier broke off all relations with him over the treatment of Palestine in the *Chatham House Survey* in the 1929-32 period, but was then reconciled.

At the same time as Professor McNeill's book there also appears a new study of Lewis Namier by Professor Linda Colley, once of Cambridge and now of Yale.[3] Published in Weidenfeld's "Historians on Historians" series, the book has no pretensions to being a full biography, but is mainly and

[1] *Arnold J. Toynbee*. By W. H. MCNEILL. Oxford University Press, £24.95.

[2] This is further documented in Sir James Headlam-Morley, *A Memoir of the Paris Peace Conference of 1919*, edited by Agnes Headlam-Morley (Methuen, 1972).

[3] *Lewis Namier*. By LINDA COLLEY. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £14.95, paper £5.95.

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rightly concerned with Namier's historical works. Indeed, while McNeill came to his material with a free hand, Professor Colley has to deal with an existing, if unsatisfactory biography of Namier by his widow, and with a splendid brief study of Namier's long engagement with Zionism by Professor Norman Rose of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem—which contains by far the best appraisal of Namier's complicated personality.[4]

THERE IS A temptation to consider together two historians who were near contemporaries—Toynbee born in West London in 1889, a year after Namier, born Ludwik Bernsztain Niemirowski in Wola Okrzejska in Russian Poland, but brought up on his family estate in Austrian Galicia. And for someone like myself, born a quarter of a century later and knowing them both as my seniors in the historical profession, the temptation is irresistible. I was a member of the history department of Manchester University when Namier was the Modern History Professor—though throughout the War and in the immediate post-War period his appearances in that capacity were very limited, as the War in its various facets absorbed almost all his energies. Toynbee I saw much less of, although I wrote three volumes for Chatham House while he was Director of Studies there. He was (as Professor McNeill makes clear) not much interested in other people's work, only in his own.

But apart from these personal considerations, there is the fact—well brought out in both books—that we have here two historians of a very different kind. Namier was and remained the professional's professional, believed by many (but not by any means all) historians to have introduced a new method into the study of political history, particularly in his work on the English 18th century. Toynbee, on the other hand, repelled many professional historians by what they thought of as absurd pretentiousness in thinking himself qualified to deal with history as a whole, and ready to rely on other writers for the "facts" which he included in his sweeping assessments of different civilisations. (I remember the eminent medievalist Bruce McFarlane of Magdalen College, Oxford, telling me that he could not bear having *The Study of History* on his shelves.)

Among Professor McNeill's most extraordinary anecdotes is one that reveals that while on an academic visit to Peking, Toynbee made a passionate declaration of love to Eileen Power—the most beautiful of female historians, it must be admitted. She got rid of her would-be lover by pretending that she was already engaged. Many years afterwards, she did indeed marry Michael Postan, probably a more original historian than either Namier or Toynbee. Postan once told me that he could find nothing in Namier on George III that he did not already know from E. and A. G. Porritt's *The Unreformed House of Commons,* published in 1903.

Namier was not a "guru" except to the extent that his reputation was sometimes echoed by people whom one suspects had not read his principal works. Toynbee became a guru, first in the United States, where he was taken up by Henry Luce under the mistaken impression that his views could be taken as endorsing the American century to come; and then in the last and rather sad section of his life among some Japanese for whom the mystical pacifism of his later writings seemed to have an overwhelming appeal.

Linda Colley must be classed among Namier's admirers as far as his 18th-century writings are concerned, though she gives a fair picture of where there has been dissent. She is less happy in dealing with Namier when he brought his powerful intellect to forward his own views of the contemporary scene under the impression that he was simply revealing the lessons of history. She shows herself as rather unfamiliar with this aspect of Namier's later writings. For instance, she says that Professor Donald Cameron Watt was the first writer—in 1954—to challenge the way in which Namier conceived of pre-1939 diplomacy. I yield to no one in my admiration of Professor Watt,[5] but in fact I myself, as early as 1948 when Namier's *Diplomatic Prelude* first appeared, questioned in *The Economist* the validity of his method, and followed it up with an article on his *Europe in Decay* in *The Fortnightly* (April 1950):

> "It is indeed as the Fouquier-Tinville of recent historiography that Professor Namier clearly sees himself—a prosecutor grimly determined that no dereliction of duty on his part shall save a single head from the guillotine-basket."

Namier, who did not take kindly to being challenged, informed all and sundry that my *Economist* review (anonymous, of course, in those days) was the work of "an hysterical woman". When he found out that I was the reviewer, he was so indignant that he refused ever to speak to me again, and maintained the boycott till the end. (I was kept in touch with Namier's denunciations by A. J. P. Taylor, our mutual friend.)

MORE IMPORTANT is that Professor Colley has failed to grasp how Namier's attacks on British and French statesmen and diplomats in the pre-War period were connected with his efforts to change the course of British policy later on. The bitterness of these writings owes a lot, no doubt, to Namier's (correct) conviction that the Western Powers could have done more to save European Jewry. But the underlying argument constantly overrates the possibility of coming to an agreement with Stalin for joint resistance to Hitler and ignores the evidence of the length of time during which Stalin had been seeking an agreement with the Germans. It was intended to fortify the plea which he had made during the War for British policy to take co-operation with the Soviet Union as its central objective.[6]

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[4] Julia Namier, *Lewis Namier: A Biography* (Oxford University Press, 1971); Norman Rose, *Lewis Namier and the Zionists* (Clarendon Press, 1980).

[5] See, e.g. the study of the diplomacy of the period 1938-39 in Watt's *How War Came* (Heinemann, 1989).

[6] When I received, in circumstances now forgotten, a copy of the Molotov-Rippentrop pact in circulation at the Nuremberg trial and printed it in the *Manchester Guardian,* Namier expressed doubts about its genuineness. So, of course, did the Soviet Union until 1989.

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For the exposition of these views, Namier used his association with E. H. Carr—paradoxically the intellectual apologist for pre-War appeasement—who was then a leading figure on *The Times*. Namier in an anonymous special article and Carr in an unsigned leader both made this case in the issue of 10 March 1943, in what the paper's historian[7] called something like a manifesto. Professor Colley does not mention Namier's connection with *The Times*, except to point out a mild anti-Semitic dig in the paper's obituary. And although she dwells much on Namier's disappointment in failing to achieve an Oxford chair, she does not mention the fact that Barrington-Ward, the editor of *The Times* during the period of Namier's connection with it, wrote to the Master of Balliol recommending Namier (his "old college friend") and Carr, in that order, for the Chair of International Relations. Balliol again.[8]

If Professor Colley's faults are those of omission, no such charge can be levied against Professor McNeill: all that is relevant to Toynbee's career is fully discussed and illuminated. It is here that his own breadth as an historian comes into play. On only one issue can he be faulted. His account of the Suez Crisis of 1956 is so perfunctory and biased as to make it impossible to understand why Toynbee's father-in-law (and at times father-figure) Gilbert Murray should, unlike Toynbee himself, have sided with Anthony Eden.

Gilbert Murray had been the great apostle of the League and later of the United Nations but by the mid-1950s he was disenchanted with the latter. Its new members were "nearly all of them uncivilized Asiatic, Arabic or South American nations with a violent anti-West prejudice or anti-civilization majority". Colonel Nasser he saw as leader of a revolt against the West. He had already criticised Toynbee's celebrated Reith Lectures for having ignored the fact "that our western or Christian civilization is better than that of Asia or Africa".[9] Nothing could be further from Toynbee in that phase.

Professor McNeill's text is commendably free of minor mistakes, though not of printer's errors. Harold Nicolson appears as Harold Nicholson and the "Terell" referred to must be Sir William (later Baron) Tyrrell. Most puzzling is that Professor McNeill consistently refers to the late Margaret Cleeve (who played an anchor role at Chatham House)

[7] Iverach McDonald, *The History of the Times*, vol. V (1984), pp. 106-7.

[8] Curiously enough, in his biography of Barrington-Ward (*In the Chair*, 1971), Donald McLachlan while giving full attention to Carr's role does not mention Namier except in relation to the recommendation for the chair. The chair actually went to Sir Lewellyn Woodward, who was in turn succeeded by Agnes Headlam-Morley, daughter of Namier's old chief in the Political Intelligence Department in World War I. . . . Small world.

[9] Duncan Wilson, *Gilbert Murray* (Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 391-94. My own sympathies at the time were with Murray. See my essay, "The Crisis and its Consequences for the British Conservative Party", William Roger Louis and Roger Owen, eds., *Suez, 1956: The Crisis and its Consequences* (Clarendon Press, 1989).

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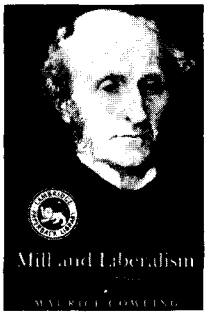

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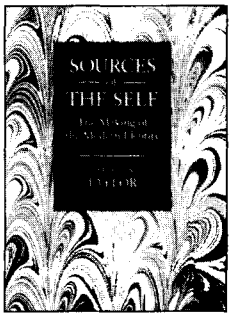

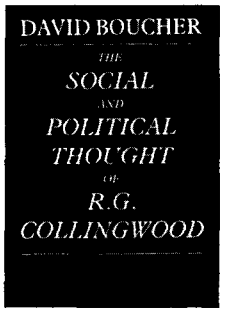

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as "Anne" Cleeve. It is the more curious in that, although he is too modest to say so, Professor McNeill wrote an important volume—*America, Britain and Russia: Their Cooperation and Conflict* (1953)—in the *Chatham House Survey* series, and must have had many contacts with Miss Cleeve. One can only assume that he has now become absorbed in Tudor history, and has Anne of Cleves somewhere floating in his mind. (This would be a Freudian slip of a kind to delight Namier, who for all his apparent pragmatism was much influenced by Freud as well as by Marx and by the "science" of graphology. Since Namier suffered from writer's cramp and rarely wrote anything by hand, he could not easily be targeted himself.)

HOWEVER, I know of no other life of an historian which has so intimately and successfully explored the connection between the life and the achievement. Indeed, some may be shocked at the revelations about both Toynbee and his family, and about his extraordinary relationship with his first wife, Rosalind Murray. Taught at Winchester and Balliol to expect success, and conscious of the lack of financial means with which to pursue what he thought was his due, Toynbee was deprived through his father's madness of a stable family background, and finding it temporarily in the Murray family meant for him accepting a degree of financial dependence upon the dreadful Lady Carlisle, Rosalind's grandmother. If ever the work ethic triumphed over adversity, this was such a triumph. The mere bulk of Toynbee's output is unique. But the achievement was at a price.

What helped Toynbee to carry it off was a degree of self-centredness which surpasses even that of Namier. Toynbee early acquired the conviction that he must always be right. What other occupant of a chair of Greek history financed by Greek donors would have felt free in the bitter years 1920-22 to espouse the cause of the Turks? Where some vestige of doubt arose—as in Toynbee's failure (unlike Namier) to enlist in the forces in the Great War and his manipulation of his medical record to avoid conscription—he managed to convince himself that it had all been different, that it was fortune that had intervened.

The other posts that he held during his long career were seen as instruments for fulfilling his own purposes. Thus he did not actively exercise his functions as Director of Studies at Chatham House, subordinating them to the writing of *The Study of History;* still less did he attach any importance to the duties of the London University chair to which the post was then linked. And when after the War he accepted periods as a Visiting Professor on American campuses, he took off whenever the opportunity arose to give lucrative lectures elsewhere.

He did not, perhaps through his conviction that he could do no wrong, seriously examine the reasons which made him a figure of importance in the United States after the War in a way in which he never had been in Britain. Accustomed to being the manipulator, he did not perceive manipulation in others.

Nor did the status of guru worry him over-much—and the reputation extended beyond the United States into continental Europe and even further afield. Travel and a physical acquaintance with the scenes upon which history had worked itself out were a feature of Toynbee's historical method from the time of his first travels in Greece before the Great War. Now he could see the wider world about which he had hitherto only learned from books—and travel not as an undergraduate counting his pennies, but as a world-famous sage, the intimate of statesmen, before whom all roads were smoothed and all restrictions disappeared. But then other figures flourished, other celebrities decorated the front cover of *Time*; and Toynbee was gradually reduced to his worshipping Japanese. One cannot do more than say that, in telling this story, Professor McNeill shows himself a writer as well as a psychologist of unique distinction.

I came away from Professor McNeill's book confirmed in the view that I held before reading it: namely, that for all its extravagances and occasional sillinesses, Toynbee's work has been somewhat underrated. It has not been difficult to puncture through well-directed research the particular configuration that he imposed upon the known past, and his changes of mind over the years (1934-61) between which the early and the last volumes appeared made this easier. But he did make a difference to some of the questions asked; he did expose the weaknesses in a Eurocentric as well as a purely national viewpoint; and, above all, he enabled his readers to discount the tendency to think that the remote past has no lessons for modern Western man.[10] Professor McNeill enables one to understand both Toynbee's sources of strength and his undoubted weaknesses.

NAMIER seems to me a more tragic figure in that he insisted (for reasons which it would take a biographer of Professor McNeill's depth of perception to explain) on dealing in his most sustained work—the George III books and the planned *History of Parliament*, now at last appearing—with a society and a polity that he could no doubt teach himself about but which remained remote and alien. For the sake of his exploration of the archives of noblemen he abandoned that area of history of which he again and again showed he had a distinctive understanding—the contested borderlands of Central and Eastern Europe which now, after 40 years of oblivion, are again filling our daily papers. Because of the struggles within his own soul between the different components of his heritage, he was uniquely qualified to write about nationalism and its impact upon the European scene. Time spent in proving (vainly) that the American Revolution was not a contest of ideas could have been devoted to examining the impact of ideas upon the 19th century, as he did in his lecture on "1848: The Revolution of the Intellectuals"—his best work. But it is not given to everyone to know where their unique gifts may lie.

[10] For an expression of my own sense of indebtedness, see my lecture "The View from St James's Square", given on the 50th anniversary of my membership of Chatham House and printed in *The National Interest*, Summer 1988.

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A Talent Unfulfilled?

Attitudes to Ackerley—By J. G. Links

J. R. Ackerley's *Hindoo Holiday* was first published in 1932. I read it soon after that, but *Brazilian Adventure* had by then appeared and we none of us had time for any books about abroad except Peter Fleming's kind. In 1952 I read the new edition of *Hindoo Holiday*, and was quite bowled over by its charm. It is an enchanting book about a toy kingdom, the native state of Chhatarpur, to which Ackerley went in the service of its Maharajah who wanted someone to love him. This, at any rate, was Ackerley's explanation in his opening sentence, and love is indeed one of the three themes of the book. Class was another, exemplified in an early incident (although it need hardly be said that class-consciousness was not confined to the British in India). A Mrs Montgomery tells of having been warned by her servant of a venomous snake in her path but nevertheless walking on. Then, she continues:

> ". . . the servant did a thing absolutely without precedent in India—he touched me!—he put his hand on my shoulder and pulled me back. My shoe came off and I stopped. Of course if he hadn't done that I should undoubtedly have been killed; but I didn't like it all the same, and got rid of him soon after."

Superstition was another theme, and His Highness was governed entirely by its complex rules which therefore applied also to the State. Love remains the central theme, and for this Ackerley knew of no rules at all. Taxed by the Maharajah with a complaint that had reached him, Ackerley defends himself:

> "'I asked for a kiss and he refused. That's all that happened. I didn't lay a finger on him.'
>
> 'But you must not do such things, Mr Ackerley,' remarked His Highness, without the smallest change of tone.
>
> 'But good Lord!' I exclaimed, 'I must kiss *somebody*.'
>
> His small body began to shake, and he hid his face in his sleeve."

Nothing very sensational once you accept that love and gender were unrelated in Chhokrapur (as Chhatarpur had become in *Hindoo Holiday*), but I did not remember the passage. It must have been one of those omitted, according to the preface, and restored for the second edition. This, we now learn from Peter Parker's *Ackerley*,[1] also ran into trouble when a book by an Indian civil servant threatened to "blow" all the identities which had been concealed, and new cuts had to be made. The present publishers refer to even the 1932 edition as "scurrilous", but it is hard to understand how the word can be applied to what Ackerley much more aptly called "a mischievous, scandalous romp" (he had agreed to delete a suggestion that His Highness had sent his barber into his wife's bed in order to produce an heir).

I may have been attracted to Ackerley by his name, for he had been registered as Joe (a worse lapse of taste than that of my own parents who at least put Joseph on my birth certificate—the last occasion it was used). In some walks of life the mateyness of the name was an asset, but Ackerley did not see it that way. Nor was he content to drop the "e" and live with the rest. He somehow acquired the middle name of Randolph and became J. R. Ackerley. This was a momentous decision for it led to his first job which led to his first book and much else. It transpired that the name made His Highness think of a stream of water running over little stones (which it does rather, whereas Jao in Chhokrapur means "go away").

By 1952 Ackerley was fifty-six and was half-way through what he later described as the happiest fifteen years of his life. A second momentous decision had made him the owner of an Alsatian bitch called Queenie. This was to be the subject of a second book—in the event, the only other subject he was ever to publish a book about. He decided to try out a section on Stephen Spender, then co-editor of Encounter. "Queenie" was apparently not considered a suitable name for an Encounter dog, so she became "Tulip" and as such she was introduced to the world in the March 1954 issue as "My Dog, Tulip". The title was unaltered, except for omission of the comma, when the book was published in 1956, but the observant reader may have wondered then why Ackerley's publishers had changed from Chatto & Windus to Secker & Warburg. We now learn that the chapter on Tulip's bowels, called "Liquids and Solids", was too much for Chatto & Windus, who in those days had to consider the Boots and other circulating-library public.

No one who has read *My Dog Tulip* is likely to have forgotten it, or to remember it with unmixed emotions. Julia Strachey spoke for many of us when, in a letter to Frances Partridge quoted by Peter Parker, she called it "a veritable marvel of brilliancy and shockingness. I don't know when I read anything so indecent, disgusting, touching, beautiful and stylish." Ackerley, we are told, was disappointed that few people realised how funny the book was. I provide a harsh testing ground for dog jokes (others, too), but had to

[1] *Ackerley: A Life of J. R. Ackerley*. By Peter Parker. Constable, £16.95.

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give way to the picture of Tulip, who had defecated on the carpets of all her master's friends, failing to do her duty before a train journey.

> "'Come on, Tulip,' I say, 'get your does done, there's a good girl.'
>
> She casts at me a jolly look but nothing more. I have left ample time for our connection . . . if Tulip had co-operated. Far from that, however, she is now regarding me with the most irritating expectancy, as though it were me, not her, of whom something was required. There is nothing for it but to walk her round the station . . . . Tulip bounds blithely ahead.
>
> 'Come on, Tulip, be a sport. Shitsy-witsy, you know'. . . . But I fear I may be presenting her in an inconsiderate, even insensitive light, and that will not do. She too has her feelings . . . ."

My Dog Tulip is unlikely to have changed the feelings of any of its readers towards dogs, but after it one felt better informed about dog owners.

Four years later, in 1960, *We Think the World of You* appeared, again with a change of publisher—The Bodley Head. Queenie/Tulip had now become Evie and this was the story of how the narrator had acquired her, with great difficulty, from a feckless young friend, Johnny, who was serving a sentence for burglary, and of his relations with Johnny's wife, baby, and parents. It was described as a novel by its publishers but it had a ring of truth to it, and I had the feeling that only the names and perhaps other details had been changed to avoid hurt feelings. Peter Parker tells us that this was indeed the case, and that Secker & Warburg (who had lost money on *My Dog Tulip*) were concerned about the libel risk. At The Bodley Head the book was declared a small masterpiece, but tiresome alterations were still demanded.

It is a revealing and subtle book, but I had had enough of Queenie and it was disappointing to find her again the leading character. (Having recently seen a brilliant, moving and beautiful film based on the book, with a dog playing Queenie as if it was her own horrible self to the life, I now realise I did not do it justice.) The narrator was openly homosexual and, almost for the first time, I wondered if this was true of the author. "What a mysterious character", I remember thinking. "I wish I knew more about him."

The sorcerer's apprentice, who could cast a spell but not stop it, must have overheard. Ackerley died in 1967. Except for a play (*The Prisoners of War*, 1925), he had published three books totalling less than 600 small pages, and was too little known even to have reached the pages of *Who's Who*. The year after his death, The Bodley Head issued *My Father and Myself*—Ackerley's account of his relationship with his father, Roger, which he had begun many years earlier. Ackerley himself, I learnt from the jacket, had been with the BBC for over 30 years, for 24 of them as Literary Editor of *The Listener*.

His father proved to have been a guardsman, probably homosexual, who later achieved such success selling bananas that he earned (and spent) £12,000 a year—an astronomical amount at the time. He had set up house with two very dull women, one of whom, Ackerley's mother, he had married 24 years after Ackerley's birth, without interrupting his relationship with the other or with his three children by her. When he died he left both families almost penniless. "I am not going to make any excuses, old man", he had written in an old letter opened after his death. "I have done my duty towards everybody as far as my nature would allow and I hope people generally will be kind to my memory."

Nothing could make this secretive and self-satisfied man very interesting, but Ackerley was now able to shock with revelations about his own habits just as he had earlier shocked with Queenie's. To shock, or upset, was, he claimed, a prime object of his life; and a promiscuous homosexual with hundreds of encounters with petty criminals, soldiers, policemen, and the very occasional well-known name, had plenty of material at his disposal. To set against this, and the sexual incontinence he believed accounted for his promiscuity, he included an account of his experience of the 1914-18 War which could hardly be bettered—and from which he emerged as a wholly admirable character.

THIS WAS ONLY the beginning of the lighting up of Ackerley's personal life. In 1975 Neville Braybrooke published over 300 out of 1,435 letters from Ackerley, which he had spent four years collecting. The degree of scholarship and the scale of the undertaking, with up to eight footnotes to a page, were such as are normally accorded to an illustrious, or notorious, public figure. Only two or three of Ackerley's friends had destroyed his letters, but these included his oldest friend and the most intimate (although not in a physical sense)—E. M. Forster. Ackerley was by no means one of the great letter-writers of the age, but 45 years of well-glossed correspondence, with an introduction and appendixes, give an impression of filling most of the gaps left by Ackerley himself, particularly as to his professional life with the BBC.

Ackerley's half-sister, Diana Petre, now weighed in with her contribution which she called, rather unfortunately, *The Secret Orchard of Roger Ackerley*. It was a harrowing story of the life their father's irresponsibility had doomed her and her family to. She had briefly worshipped Joe, who did not emerge from the relationship with any credit.

There remained his sister Nancy, scarcely referred to in anything that had gone before. Only after her death in 1979 was Francis King, Ackerley's literary executor, able to publish *My Sister and Myself*, an account of their "symbiosis", which he described as "a ghastly caricature of the kind of marriage, devoid of sex, that is held together merely by feelings of obligation, pity and guilt". King had inherited 22 notebooks from which he had extracted the entries, mostly during 1948 and 1949, in which Ackerley reflected at length on the behaviour of his terrible sister and on his own reactions to it. Nothing was too trivial to record, and one wonders how he could have been bothered to write these interminable notes day after day. All that can be said about them (by me at any rate) is that for some indefinable reason they make irresistible reading, rather as if Pepys had really let himself go.

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All this does not seem to leave much in the way of unpublished material for a full account of Ackerley's life, but Peter Parker has found a prodigious amount of widely distributed material to add to it. At first the sceptical reader finds himself asking, "How does he know that?", but many references to the unobtrusively-placed source notes engender confidence which later spot-checks do nothing to weaken. Parker is scrupulously just to his subject; indeed slightly biased in his favour if the evidence is against him, as it often is. Ackerley's sex life was repellent, not only because of its promiscuity and coarseness, but also because of the mild exhibitionism which inclined him to gloat over it. Parker defends him valiantly, suggesting that Ackerley looked on his promiscuity as a genuinely Platonic search for the "other half" of his soul, but the idea cuts no ice at all. Perhaps the most interesting pages of *My Father and Myself* are the final ones in which Ackerley discusses the transformation of his life after "peace and contentment reached" him in the shape of an Alsatian bitch. "From the moment she established herself in my heart and home, my obsession with sex fell wholly away from me", he writes; and confesses that perhaps he never had wanted a human Ideal Friend. What *did* he want?

HIS WORK LIFE gave him no greater satisfaction. The job of literary editor is as exacting as its holder chooses. The contributor does the work; the journal editor takes the responsibility. In the choice of contributor the literary editor can rely on well-tried writers and offer them the kind of book a reader would expect them to review, or he can discover, and guide, unknown talent and persuade established writers to sharpen their wits on unexpected subjects. Leafing through the bound volumes of *The Listener*, and reading his correspondence, leaves a strong impression that Ackerley preferred the first course (many of the reviews in the earlier years are unsigned, and so provide no evidence either way). Parker uses Ackerley's dictum that people *ought* to be upset as the epigraph to his book. "If I had a paper I would upset them all the time", the quotation continues. But he didn't have a paper; he was a paid employee of the BBC and it was his responsibility to know how far he could go and still avoid trouble for his editor and himself. Instead, he frequently pressed his editor to publish items he knew were against BBC policy instead of winning the BBC round to change. One contributor told of being called to the telephone at midnight. It was Ackerley at the printers. "Sorry, dear boy, but have you got your galley?" Stark naked he fetched it. "Second paragraph from the end, penultimate sentence. I've been worrying about that comma. Could we drop it?"

Rather endearing to some (not all) contributors, but could not his readers, as well as his employers, have been served better in other ways? Later he confessed that he was not sufficiently interested in *The Listener* even to read it. In fact he rather despised it, as he despised the BBC. A sad confession after giving more than 30 years of his working life to them.

By this time Ackerley was a wreck. He had retired from the BBC in 1959 and had an annual income of £1,200 on which he had to maintain his "three women"—the ever-demanding sister Nancy and their aunt, both of whom lived with him off and on, and Queenie. He had tried everyone he knew (and he knew everyone in the publishing world) about possible part-time employment, but without success—a significant comment on his reputation after 30 years of working with them. Other than tinkering with *My Father and Myself*, as he had been doing for so long, and transcribing his old diaries, he was doing no work and was drinking so much that he found himself falling about in his own flat. The clouds parted in 1961 when, thanks to Elizabeth Bowen and Philip Toynbee, he won a literary award of £1,000; this he saw as enabling him to be careless of expense on drink. He often did not bother to wash or shave, and announced that his chief concern was to "reduce the hours of consciousness to less than 12". He sponged on Forster, perhaps the only human being he ever cared for, and despicably sold Forster's letters without his knowledge "to enable Nancy and me to drink ourselves carelessly into our graves". Against this, after Forster, then 82, had had a stroke, Ackerley did go to Cambridge regularly to help him.

He was still vain. In 1949 he had described himself to his diary as prominent and cultivated, and in 1959 he was convinced that he was a beautiful old man. Parker supports him, saying that "he still looked extremely distinguished", but the photograph on the back of the jacket certainly does not support Parker. It might be said that a vain man could not have lived in the squalor of Ackerley's flat in later years or have carried his teeth in his pocket except when he wanted to smile at a promising passer-by. But Ackerley would no doubt have deplored consistency. He crusaded for the rights of animals and "would keep thinking of the death of animals . . . to keep the human race going". But it would be difficult to be a vegetarian "without being a bother", and Queenie must not be deprived of her horsemeat (which he took to his office in the leg-pocket of his trousers, or bundled into his rucksack, staining contributors' manuscripts with blood). He died in his sleep on 4 June 1967. The extent of his talents is arguable: that he failed to make use of them is not.

SUCH IS the verdict of one rather priggish juror on the case presented by Peter Parker. But his account is so well balanced, and he holds the attention with such skill, that others may well close his book with compassion rather than exasperation. For Parker, *My Father and Myself* is Ackerley's masterpiece, the book on which his reputation rests secure. This is far from my own judgment, which would have it rest on *Hindoo Holiday* and see it as one of unfulfilled promise. Yet without *My Father and Myself* little would have been known of Ackerley the man, and Parker's book might never have been written. This would have been a sad loss. It establishes Peter Parker as a biographer with outstanding qualities. I hope his next subject will be more worthy of them.

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Books Encountered

Dream of Commonwealth 1921-42. By MAX BELOFF. Macmillan, £37.50.

Second volume of Lord Beloff's masterly *Imperial Sunset*, carrying the story of Empire-into-Commonwealth up to (and slightly beyond) the fall of Singapore. "It will be for a younger scholar", says the author, to write the once projected third volume, possibly called *The Great Retreat*. It will be hard to equal the depth, detail, insight, and wisdom of what we have.

The Writer's Mind: Interviews with American Authors. Vol. I. Edited by IRV BROUGHTON. University of Arkansas Press, £14.20.

Handsomely produced, with photographs, but slightly disappointing collection: Allen Tate and Richard Eberhart are the most eminent; but writer-director Samuel Fuller is the most rewarding. The others are John Beecher, Kay Boyle, John Ciardi, Malcolm Cowley, Guy Carleton Drewry, Brewster Ghiselin, A. B. Guthrie, Jr., Josephine Jacobsen, André Norton, and William Stafford.

Exploding English: Criticism, Theory, Culture. By BERNARD BERGONZI. Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press, £25.00.

Honest, witty, concerned and expert account, partly scaffolded with autobiography, of a generation's changes in English studies, charting the ever more uneasy coexistence of literary scholarship, practical criticism, post-structuralism, pure theory, and attention to popular and other culture. Sneaking sympathy for simpler but not unsophisticated men-of-letters, too.

Unruly Times: Wordsworth and Coleridge in their Time. By A. S. BYATT. Hogarth Press, £7.99.

Timely reissue of a perceptive, well-illustrated account of the Lake Poets, unrevised since 1970, but not seriously affected by, e.g., the recent work of Gill and others, or the correspondence between William and Mary Wordsworth, which simply substantiates the insights in the original edition.

Memoirs of a Mendicant Professor. By D. J. ENRIGHT. Carcanet, £7.95.

Another welcome reissue of a quizzical, good-humoured sort-o'-biography by a wandering scholar more scalawag and widely travelled than any of Helen Waddell's. Imagine Lucky Jim in the Far East, with the fun but not the boorishness. An epilogue explains that the book used to have *samizdat* status in Singapore.

Lords of Poverty. By GRAHAM HANCOCK. Macmillan, £14.95.

The subtitle reads: "The free-wheeling lifestyles, power, prestige and corruption of the multi-billion dollar aid business." Although partly anecdotal, the indictment is very telling. NGOs like Oxfam come off better than the World Bank. Ineptitude is part of it. But is stopping all aid really the answer?

Baden-Powell. By TIM JEAL. Hutchinson, £18.95.

The Scout movement, sometimes derided, has widened horizons, spanned social classes, and channelled energies that could have been anti-social. But its founder was a troubled eccentric. Jeal's massive biography reveals a repressed, inactive homosexual: he didn't starve the Blacks at Mafeking, but did underrate their role. A good book; and on the whole a good man.

Night Times and Light Times: A Journey through Lapland. By DAVID HAY JONES. Hamish Hamilton, £14.99.

Part travel book, part impressionistic fragment of autobiography that reads like a novel: Englishman from Barnet, mother Danish, father Welsh, leaves Greek wife and children, travels to Norway, Sweden, USSR; meets farmer's daughter; finds new life in Sami (Lapp) world; pleads for wilderness against suits and cities. Crisp, laconic, dour.

Red Victory: A History of the Russian Civil War. By W. BRUCE LINCOLN. Simon & Schuster, $24.95, £18.00.

Seven million dead: this was the cost of the 1918-21 civil war that gave the Bolsheviks victory. Professor Lincoln here epically completes the trilogy he began with *In War's Dark Shadow* (pre-1914) and continued with *Passage Through Armageddon* (1914-17): it ends with Trotsky's murder and Stalin's triumph. A fine blend of scholarship and readability.

Roads to Xanadu: East and West in the Making of the Modern World. By JOHN MERSON. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £17.95.

A sumptuous bargain, "tied in" with the TV series, by its Australian presenter who doubles as an academic. Its coffee-table format and illustrations enhance a scholarly exploration of culture-contact and technology-exchange from Marco Polo to Deng Xiao-ping: but the writing predated the 1989 tragedy, and it rather shows.

Ginsberg: A Biography. By BARRY MILES. Viking, £20.00.

The publishers bill this as "the first biography of Allen Ginsberg since 1968"—and he was only born in 1926! Exhaustingly detailed, it has the breathless and uncritical quality of a showbiz or rock-star biography: but at least it recreates that dizzy, self-indulgent period, heyday of the Beats.

Life after Life: Interviews with Twelve Murderers. By TONY PARKER. Secker & Warburg, £14.95.

Absorbing, faintly voyeuristic, but compassion-inducing monologues, skilfully caught by the Boswell of the tape-recorder. Those recorded are articulate, some plausible, most pitiable: hardly representative of all killers, including professionals. But it implicitly makes the case for mercy, not execution.

Opera in Crisis: Tradition, Present, Future. By HENRY PLEASANTS. Thames and Hudson, £11.95.

Misleading title: this hardly investigates astronomic costs and inadequate subsidies, but collects sparkling essays on dead-end modernism, "produceritis", TV close-ups, rising pitch, and a host of other (mainly vocal) musical subjects. One only wishes he'd grapple more closely with the deficiencies of the *avant-garde*.

Alan Moorehead. By TOM POCOCK. The Bodley Head, £16.95.

Evocative, discreetly gossipy life of the World War II correspondent, author, and stroke victim, concentrating more on the newspaper work than on the equally impressive books on African exploration, etc. Oddly hard on colleagues Jenny Nicholson and Clare Hollingworth, both more likeable than portrayed here.

In the Nineties. By JOHN STOKES. Harvester Wheatsheaf, £17.50.

The dust-jacket (*Olympia* by Jules Chéret) suggests Naughty-Nineties frou-frou. In fact, this is a scholarly probe, via press and other archives, into social concerns suggested or stirred by canonical works from Wilde, Hardy, James, etc.: prison, prudery, impressionism, suicide, Grub Street, "decadence".

Acting Solo: The Art of One-Man Shows. By JORDAN R. YOUNG. Apollo Press, £16.95.

Well researched and illustrated history-plus-survey of its subject, reputedly originated by Samuel Foote (1721-77), and much boosted by production costs. Performers profiled include Alec McCowen, Ruth Draper, Joyce Grenfell, Lily Tomlin, Emlyn Williams, Roy Dotrice, Ian McKellen, Micheál MacLiammóir, Spalding Gray, and Julie Harris, who writes a preface.

R.M.

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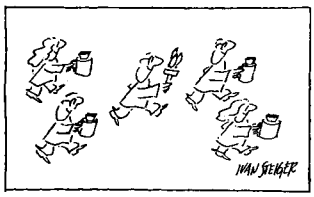
DISCUSSION

Between Propaganda & Reality

Views on George Urban's "Paradox"

Paradoxical Images

By Martin Esslin



GEORGE URBAN ("The Paradox of Truth-Telling", ENCOUNTER, November) makes some very valid points—when he draws attention to the consequences of the impact of a truer picture of the Western world in the *glasnost*-shaken East. But I think he falls into the same error that he attributes to Soviet and Eastern intellectuals.

The fact is that George Urban—"a bourgeois intellectual" (in the Tocquevillean rather than the Marxist pejorative sense) if ever there was one—has contact mainly with similar individuals in the Eastern world. That they tend to be disillusioned and disappointed when they encounter the truth about the horrors of low-brow Western pop-culture (not to speak of drugs, homelessness, crime and, above all, a general spiritual vacuum), I have no doubt. On the other hand, it is my impression that these people also tend to have been fairly well-informed about the realities of the West. Not many of them will have imagined the Western world to be populated entirely by the paragons who broadcast over the BBC or Radio Free Europe.

The proof of that, to me, seems to lie in the fact that the pop-culture of the West, in all its manifestations, has attained an immense interest and popularity, an almost uncanny attractiveness among the broad masses of the Eastern-bloc countries. Not only Coca-Cola and Pepsi and Comics, not only Rock-music and Jeans exercise a magnetic charm on these populations, but videos of Western soap-operas and pop concerts are traded on the black market at immense premiums. This may be depressing to a Western intellectual. But the fact that American pop-culture, the product of a market economy in the field of entertainment—and thus, like it or not, a truly democratic expression of popular taste—has conquered the world, First, Second and Third, is one of the major cultural phenomena of our time.

Nor is it, if you think of it, such a very bad thing. There is no rigid dividing line between popular and high culture. Chaplin and Buster Keaton, Hitchcock, the Marx Brothers, and John Ford's Westerns were products of a pop-culture and have now become cult-objects of high culture; so have Sherlock Holmes, P. G. Wodehouse, Georges Simenon and Raymond Chandler. The lines of communication between pop and high culture are numerous and wide open. It is out of the immense quantity, the gigantic heap of cultural compost that the pop-culture provides, that some of the finest blooms of high culture emerge.

That the Western world is in the grip of spiritual malaise, expressed in the drug culture, alcoholism, crime, and mental *accidie* is a much more serious problem for the Eastern intellectuals to come to grips with. On the other hand, they know the same problem within their own sphere in even more drastic, if slightly different, forms. A *glasnost*-inspired Soviet

MARTIN ESSLIN *was a member of the BBC for 30 years. He is the author of a widely read biography of Bertolt Brecht, and a history of the avant-garde theatre. He lives in London, and is a semi-annual Professor of Drama at Stanford University, California.*

EDWARD PEARCE, *formerly the political columnist and theatre critic of* ENCOUNTER, *now writes a column for "The Sunday Times" (London).*

KLAUS SCHÜTZ *was for many years the Director of West German radio broadcasting to the East ("Deutsche Welle"). He lives in Berlin, and in the 1960s was its Social Democratic Governing Mayor.*

VICTORIA MAXIMOVA *was born (1957) and educated in Leningrad. She settled in Britain a few years ago, and has a BA from the University of Manchester and an MLitt. from the University of Oxford, where, after a period as Research Student in Russian philosophy at St Catherine's College, she also received a DPhil. She monitors Soviet broadcasts for the BBC and freelances for the Russian Department of the BBC World service.*

R. V. BURKS *is Professor Emeritus of History at Wayne State University. During the 1960s he was the Policy Director of Radio Free Europe in Munich.*

HERB GREER *is an American playwright and author who has lived in Europe since the early 1950s; he has written for* ENCOUNTER *on aspects of the media and censorship.*

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film like the recent *Little Vera* showed a landscape of mental and spiritual desolation in a Russian provincial city infinitely more disastrous than anything to be found even in the worst black-spots in the West.

The masses afflicted by that non-quality of life in the East will, no doubt, remain eagerly avid for the consumer goods and cheap thrills of Western-type pop-culture for a long time to come—and these, if they get hold of even a few of them, will mean an improvement in the felt quality of their own lives.

The intellectual élites will, of course, have to come to terms with the fading of their over-idealised picture of the West—in so far as they entertained such an image. But the debate and the heart-searchings this is bound to provoke should provide a salutary contribution to what, it seems to me, should be the main, most urgent objective on the world's agenda: how to deal with the desolation created by an affluent, materialist culture totally devoid of a recognisable spiritual or moral foundation. . . .

Yes, We Have Bananas

By Edward Pearce

A GREAT IRONY has been added to George Urban's concern about the East's image of ourselves, high and low, by the sudden flood of tabloid news from East Berlin. As *The Sun* magisterially put it: "*Champagne Reds Quit in Girlie Scandal.*" I may have improved that headline, but what the hell. . .

The sudden revelation of major corruption—blue movies, sex-catered parties, as well as the full details of the quotidian swimming-pool luxury available at the Wandlitz woodland compound—appears to have struck the East Germans very hard for precisely the reasons of captive virtue which interested George Urban in his reflections about their likely reactions to our awfulness.

After all, one does not on balance expect orgies to be part of a British Cabinet Minister's "*At Home*"; and participation in the cocaine trade—alleged against certain East German functionaries—would be looked at askance at Westminster. But such restraint is, after all, only a function of the secondary role of Western politicians. Virtue in the upper rungs of society is enjoined hardest some little way short of the top; higher standards are required of civil servants than politicians, and of politicians than of the seriously rich.

Little of the Wandlitzer Quadrille of sex and drug-taking activity would have sensational impact in the circles of the Western super-rich, the true equivalents of the Eastern political élite. And the West, over many years of voyeuristic journalism, has practised a Mithridatean therapy of small, innoculatory sips. A little scandal at a time, heavily focused on identified delinquents, has allowed the public to be agreeably censorious and yet enjoy a jolly frisson.

The shock of those Saxons and Prussians—mentally filtered on two puritan cultures, Lutheran and Marxist—at the sins of their own leaders surely answers the question about Us and Them. Debased Western culture (a low popular press, a diet of sensations and trash television) is going to be both fascinating and deeply shocking—and alas, they are going to enjoy it. The question is for how long.

A friend of mine, now a blameless academic, tells of an excess of his youth. When rationing and shortages started to fade away in the early 1950s, he, who had only heard of bananas through the reminiscent moans of his elders, asked his mother to buy two pounds of them. These he put in a bowl and mashed them up, adding sugar and milk. He then devoured them, was violently sick, and has since shown little interest in bananas.

Those are the options for the East Germans: Mithridates the sipper; or my friend the banana-eater. They won't die either way, but the capacity to idealise will take a mighty knock and some good citizens of Weimar will, by way of the trashblatts and the soap operas, become addicted to bananas.

Finding the Truth

By Klaus Schütz

BASICALLY, I AM convinced that there is actually no special "paradox in truth-telling" when we reassess the "foreign broadcasts" of the West to Eastern Europe. At least, I never experienced it in all my years of contacts with listeners in the East German state, where our audiences had for 40 years continuous access to West German radio and, later, television.

Most of the foreign broadcasters I know have tried, and still try, to show the West as objectively and as realistically as possible; and they usually make earnest efforts to picture also the negative aspects of their respective Western countries. But anyone who has ever been involved in operations of this kind knows that it is not very easy on short-wave radio to communicate problematical areas of life in the West accurately: there are political-bureaucratic pressures to overrepresent the achievements of one's country in general and also the accomplishments of its present government. In addition, every broadcaster has prejudices, preferences, and presumptions of his or her own which media executives in a free society feel obliged to respect.

In my view, most of the East Europeans do have a fairly accurate picture—with its virtues and vices—of life in the West. Partly, because the Communist media have in the past overstressed this latter part in grotesque distortion. Partly, because they had other ways of finding the many-sided truth. I was fascinated to listen recently to those many East Ger-

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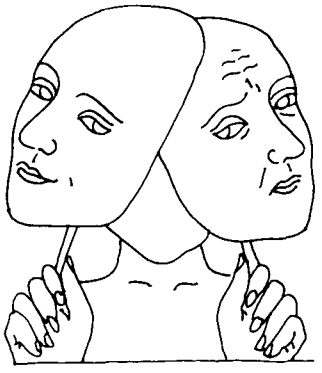
mans when they give their reasons for leaving the *DDR*. Nearly everybody added: "We know it will not be easy in the West—and we do not have any illusions. . . ." And, after talking to some of them, I am more than ever convinced that they are right: that they know what to expect. Indeed, they seem to know more about the Federal Republic, including its shortcomings, than most West Germans themselves.

Visions of the West

By Victoria Maximova



THE ATTITUDES that Eastern Europeans have towards the West are not as clear-cut and unequivocal as George Urban tries to suggest. In contrast to Urban's bold assumptions, Eastern Europe is not a single economic or cultural body. Hungary and Poland, although until recently within the sphere of Soviet influence, have been geographically and historically much closer to the West than the Soviet Union. This in effect means that, situated fully within the European continent, Eastern Europe, as far as the Soviet border, has historically been much closer to the West in its aspirations, its way of life, and thinking.

Russia, on the other hand, is a completely separate case, and as Urban says little about it, let me restore the balance. Visions there of the West are not something that was ushered in by foreign radio broadcasts, and has now crumbled with the advent of *glasnost*. Russian attitudes to the West have always been ambivalent, and are much older than their socialist isolation. They constitute an age-old problem and are a cause of Russia's permanent schizophrenia, which can be traced back over hundreds of years.

It was in the 19th century that the formation of the two camps—Westernisers and Slavophiles—finally gave cultural shape to Russia's spiritual geography: half of it belonging to the West and half to the East. Having assimilated, in the words of Karl Popper, the vast Hegelian historicist generalisations, the Westernisers saw the answer to Russian problems in the Industrial Revolution, and in prosperity of a Western type. Whereas the Slavophiles, detesting the capitalist West, saw the solution in the mini-socialism inherent in what were then Russia's peasant communes. It was in fact Dostoevsky who warned his countrymen against idealising the spiritless, immoral, and materialistic West. And yet at the other extreme we had Turgenev, who, unable to face the squalor of Russian rural existence, escaped for 30 years of his life to enjoy the favours of the actress Poline Viardot and the gastronomic delights of France.

The long-running row between Westernisers and Slavophiles has survived into the 20th century in the form of an argument between the camp of Solzhenitsyn among exiled writers, or Rasputin inside the Soviet Union (who want to develop Siberia and take the country back to its 17th-century rural roots), and the camp of the late Andrei Sakharov, the martyr of the 1960s Soviet dissident movement (who espoused a Western type of democracy). The self-imprisonment that has occurred under the Soviet régime is therefore a consequence rather than the cause of a certain image that the Russians have built of the West.

Under the Soviet régime, the argument about the West and the degree to which it should be allowed to influence the Soviet Empire has extended to grassroots levels. The crystal-palace vision of the West that George Urban writes about is indeed favoured by Russia's town population. But this sec-

Better Worlds?

THE ARTICLE *by George Urban on the paradox of truth-telling was certainly original; and it has provoked some stimulating discussions among my friends here in what is being more and more called "Mittel-Europa". The question he raises, with characteristic candour (if also with a measure of pessimism), is whether we East Germans, and our Hungarian, Czech and Polish friends—and there will be more to come—will be able to adapt Western institutions with all their liberties and licenses so that we can preserve a certain cultural tone and not go the way of all sleaze.*

There appear to be a number of attitudes here . . . .

(1) No—pluralism will degenerate in the free down-market into corruption and obscenity, without even the traditional Anglo-American safeguards that keep these kinds of evils in place in the West. . . .

(2) Yes—for in the East there has developed a realistic, keen-witted, political sense that will cultivate the virtues of new-born democracy without its obvious and glaring vices. . . .

I call George Urban's attention (with his experience in radio—BBC, Radio Free Europe—he would appreciate the passage) to these lines in John le Carré's latest novel, "The Russia House" (1989, pp. 276-77):

> **"She switched on her little radio and ran through the shortwave bands. . . . But as she listened to the different voices clamouring for her soul—Deutsche Welle, Voice of America, Radio Liberty, Voice of Israel, Voice of God-knew-whom, each one so cosy, so superior, so compelling—an angry confusion came over her. I'm a Russian, she wanted to shout back at them. Even in tragedy, I dream of a better world than yours!"**

So there we have it—even in dissent from tragic totalitarianism, there may emerge no cool evaluation of the path ahead for non-Marxist post-Communist societies. Nationalist emotions and delusive dreams can emerge again, and cause other distortions among different institutions.

This may not be a "paradox" but it is a truth worth telling.

RAINER-MARIA BRANDT

Berlin

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tion is only marginal in proportion to the Soviet Union's rural population, who by no means favour the West as an asylum from socialist deformities. On the contrary, prompted to succumb to anti-capitalist propaganda by their own historical fear of the West, they still believe that Western countries are being pulled to pieces by contrasts, that they cosset the exploiting rich and deprive the exploited poor, that they are a paradise for millionaires and hell for tramps.

STUDY AT SCHOOL of 19th-century West European novels such as those of Dickens and Zola only fosters inherent fear of the materialist and predatory West. This could not and cannot be dissolved by information fed by foreign radio services: often having no access even to electricity, people in some provinces hardly have the opportunity to listen to domestic radio, let alone to foreign broadcasts.

Most of the foreign-language radio services, incidentally, are not staffed, as Urban writes, by British highbrow intellectuals, but mainly by people who, originating from the countries they broadcast to, were in the past themselves at the receiving end of those radio stations. Undoubtedly, having lived in most cases in cultural centres, they constitute the intellectual élite of the countries they come from.

The vision of the West as a Milky Way fairytale land does indeed still persist among certain parts of the Soviet urban population, mainly in the cultural centres. I myself, when living in Leningrad in my teens under Brezhnev, happened to be a victim of unbridled idealisation of the West. Why did I and some of my friends idealise it? Was this a result of propaganda from either side? No, rather we were affected by a mixture of fantasy and reality, of fact and fiction. We did not distinguish between America and Western Europe. Under Brezhnev, there were few Western Europeans among tourists visiting the Soviet Union. It was mainly Americans who we used to encounter in the streets, theatres, and tourist attractions. And what we knew or observed about Americans we used to apply, without discrimination, to the Germans, the French, and the British.

Only five years ago, meeting Americans on the Nevsky Prospect in Leningrad, weighed down by numerous long-lens and video cameras, was a sight sweeping in its effect. They seemed to be people belonging to a superior race. Not only did they wear clothes different from ours, not only did they speak "perfect" English—the envy of most young people in town; they also smelled different. They walked differently. In a word, they seemed to have come from a make-believe land. It seemed that they did not just walk—they strode. You wished to absorb the confidence of their gestures, and their uninhibited manner. They were not like the English, whose modesty did not allow them to spread themselves and take space. The more space Americans took, the more comfortable they seemed. When sitting they were not embarrassed to stretch their legs full length; when talking, their hands flew in many different directions for emphasis. On entering an Intourist hotel one would be enveloped to the point of intoxication by the light, sweet aromas of Western perfume. Only now do I realise that those perfumes may not have been all that expensive, but at the time they smelled of millions in hard currency. These were people "out of context". You could not associate them with any background you had knowledge or experience of. But you felt privileged to be among them, and you had a nebulous, almost existential sense of hope—general "objectless" hope.

The novels of Theodore Dreiser (Jeffrey Archer's early 20th-century American precursor), relating life stories of newspaper boys who turned into money-barons, further promoted this image. Refracting in our imagination, the it-all-started-with-staking-ten-cents-on-the-stock-market plots created the wishful impression that the West is a Babylon, where the sun always shines, where everyone lives in large magnificent houses, drives enormous white limousines, leads a happy problem-free life, where everyone is clever, educated, well-informed, and reads the books you have never read.

This image is not a result of foreign stations broadcasting to the Soviet Union. It is formed from within rather than from without. It is a result of Russia's century-long cultural isolation—not of a 70-year-long separation. In the Soviet Union there will always be those who worship the West and those who detest it. And for those who still live in the Soviet Union and worship the West, *glasnost* is unlikely to promote the collapse of its image. As to people who do not believe in the Western option, they will always find evidence against it. The political times may well have changed. But people and their mentality are mostly stalled in their stride by history, tradition, their backgrounds, and the knowledge they have accumulated since childhood and teenage years.

Élite to Élite

By R. V. Burks

I THINK George Urban should take into account the special circumstances under which, in the years of ideological confrontation, we broadcast to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Soviet domination of Eastern Europe did not threaten America's vital interests and, in any case, the danger of nuclear escalation made any use of force by one superpower against the other a high-risk undertaking. But Communism challenged us and had to be challenged—hence the "cold" war.

Since our broadcasts were one element in a "war-time" situation and so much was otherwise at stake, it became easy to recruit élite personnel. Take Jan Nowak, the head of the Polish Broadcasting Department at Radio Free Europe, as an example—a man who in more peaceful times might well have been head of a Christian Democratic government in

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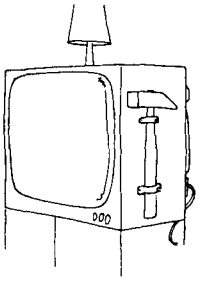
Warsaw instead of a broadcasting department in Munich.

Nor did we at RFE have to face serious competition from other Western stations. The régime radios scarcely counted as competition; their audiences had to be "protected" from us by very costly jamming. Or to worry that our popular rating might be too low. In fact we had the money to hire a half-dozen public-opinion institutes in various parts of Western Europe to ask travelling East Europeans returning home to fill out anonymous but detailed questionnaires. Most travellers willingly did so; in consequence we knew pretty well who listened to what, and why. No ordinary radio station, or television transmitter for that matter, could have afforded such a service. And then there were the high-ranking East European bureaucrats, including Cabinet Ministers, who, upon reaching Hamburg or Rotterdam on government business, would telephone some of the heads of our national broadcasting departments to give their addresses and their length of stay. (Thus it was we became respected voices in the East European national debates—many years before *glasnost*.)

ALL IN ALL, I have some difficulty understanding the complaints of Urban's East European friends that the Western society they are now coming to know is crass and boring, far from the élite character of Western cold-war broadcasts.

Television & the Dark Ages



I BELIEVE *that television demeans and trivializes everything and everyone connected with it, that in short it is responsible for the downfall of civilization. We are in the midst of a new Dark Age. This one, however, has been brought about, paradoxically enough, not by the suppression of knowledge and information but by their dazzling assault on our senses. The result has been nothing short of catastrophic.*

For all practical purposes, everything in our American society has become a branch of entertainment: business, news, politics, religion, you name it. Why? When people can no longer make sense of their world because of (a) its sheer complexity and (b) the overwhelming volume of supposed "information" with which we are bombarded daily, from the arcane and esoteric to the titillating and trivial, then they will seek coherence elsewhere. They find it in the endless pursuit of non-stop, disconnected sights, sounds, images and pleasing personalities that pretend to offer them the pretense of coherence.

We no longer prefer to confront reality directly, for long ago we learned and accepted the fact that reality has for all practical purposes become unmanageable. Instead we have turned our energies to the proliferation and production of endless amounts of unreality to soothe our tired and fractured egos.

TELEVISION IS, **of course, the prime culprit, for it has become the model for everything in our society. Everything now either imitates or caricatures television as television itself caricatures and imitates everything else.**

We have newspapers, magazines and even "books" in the form of television screens or television reality. Thus, "USA Today", the newspaper, is a simulation of "TV News" that is itself a simulation of "real news". And "USA Today on TV" is a simulation of "USA Today", the newspaper. At each step in the chain we recede further from reality. And each step heightens a felt sense of unreality.

Television is particularly insidious, for it is the very background, the very oxygen of our new world. It is wrong, dangerously so, to think that television is merely a harmless, trivial simulation of reality. It has become both a simulation of reality and reality itself. There is in fact no reality any more. It's all artefact. We have so thoroughly merged symbols, information and entertainment that few of us can distinguish between them.

TELEVISION *has not only distorted our ability to deal with complexity; it also may have altered irreversibly our desire to confront reality. Star interviewers like Donahue, Geraldo and Oprah are no longer merely caricatures of "truth" or "journalism". They are no longer merely filters or portrayers of reality. They have become the "new reality".*

A law of 20th-century communication has become evident: the length of a sound bite is inversely proportional to the complexity of the world and the overload of information to which we are exposed. Columnist George Will summarized it best when he noted that if Lincoln were alive today, "he would be forced to say, 'Read my lips: No more slavery'."

This is the level to which America's national discourse has descended. This is the promise of the mass media. As Paddy Chayefsky once said, "Television is democracy at its ugliest". And as Fred Friendly remarked, "There is no incentive for television to do its best when it can make so much money by doing its worst."

GIVEN THE CONTEMPT **in which I hold television, why would I want to appear on it to promote a new book that deals with its perverse effects? I have no easy answer. I struggle daily to find one. The best that I have been able to come up with is that I believe strongly that there is a deep, unsatisfied hunger on the part of the American people for something better, for something that speaks directly to our constant search for meaning on the basic issues of life itself.**

This hunger can never fully be extinguished by the media powers-that-be. I believe in speaking as directly to that hunger as I can, although I have no illusions whatsoever with regard to changing the odious system that governs the airwaves.

THERE ARE POCKETS *of the public which hunger for something far better than the media moguls give us. In fact, I think there is another quasi-law that describes our current situation: the hunger for something better is directly proportional to the constant banality that we are fed.*

Ian L. Mitroff
in THE LOS ANGELES TIMES

IAN L. MITROFF *is Director of the Center for Crisis Management and Professor of Business Policy at the University of Southern California.*

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Élites are small in number. If a radio or a TV station has to turn a profit, it must appeal to Mr Average Man; it has little interest in playing to the concerns of élites. Should those East European intellectuals who have now achieved the freedom to choose—to emigrate, to vote, to peruse a reasonably honest press—not be satisfied with the pluralism of a democratic, market-oriented society?

I recognise the primary role of the catastrophic failure of Soviet Central Planning as basic to today's ferment in the USSR and Eastern Europe. But I do not wish to detract from the importance of cold war broadcasts to the present-day political landslides in Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Bulgaria. Prerequisite to "the new pluralism" in Eastern Europe were also those broadcasts.

Vacuity, & All That

By Herb Greer

SOME YEARS AGO an anxious friend of mine asked advice about what he should do with his life. He had spent time odd-jobbing in Europe, mainly selling advertising for an American magazine, while acquiring a young American's sentimental education abroad. His job had come to an end, and he wanted to go back home; but he felt that his European experience should somehow carry him beyond a career in business. He was considering doing "something in the Arts" instead, and what did I think about that?

My friend—I'll call him Henry—was generous, agreeable most of the time, not outstanding in the brain department, but not by any means stupid, either. In America he had suspected that something was missing in his life, without quite knowing what that was. The European atmosphere had eased this sensation. Henry supposed that, having absorbed *something* over here, he would be able to hang on to it by following a cultural career. He was a little uncertain about which of the arts to choose, and because I was a produced playwright with some performed music also to my credit, he thought I might help him to decide.

What could I say to Henry? I liked him. He was living refutation of the stupid and snobbish idea that in order to be an interesting and useful human being, one must somehow paint or write or compose or something. He had helped me out (and not only me) a few times with money, and even put me up once or twice when I needed accommodation. He was a comfortable man to drink with of an evening; he could share a meal without being tedious; and after a few drinks, he could be unpredictable and fun. But as to creative talent, he had none at all. Henry's artistic flair was strictly in the consuming line; his taste was good; but he was like Ezra Pound's Phyllidula: he received more pleasure than he could give.

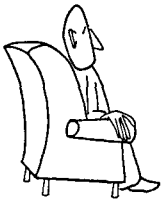
My problem was to tell him this without upsetting him. Not face to face, but in a letter, I pointed out that following an artistic occupation does not by itself make one an artist, and said that I could not give him advice in this matter, because no one but Henry himself really knew whether or not he could cope with such a career. He thanked me for what he called a sensible letter, and went back to America, not to be an artist but simply to get on with his life.

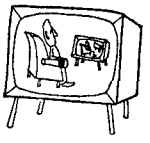
I DID NOT THINK of Henry again for years. Not, in fact, until I read George Urban's "The Paradox of Truth-Telling" in the November ENCOUNTER. It seemed to me that George Urban was describing a lot of East Europeans who were making the same mistake about "the West and Freedom" that my old friend Henry had made about "the Arts". A certain kind of political nobility does exist in the West. It involves an 18th-century inheritance which is now embodied in certain *choices* about politics; about movement, culture; about all the novelties which seem to worry those who have not until now shared "the hazards of openness" (and the other ingredients of "modernity, fashion, and audience-ratings" which we take for granted).

George Urban's interlocutors, and he himself, paradoxically, seem to take it for granted that simple exposure to the West should so to speak, ennoble the Eastern refugee, without the difficulty of personal choice. It follows that the existence of vulgarity and *nyekulturnye* phenomena block ennoblement, or make it less than automatic, and that this is the fault of the Western "system" which allows such things to exist.

The remarks by George Walden, in a box ("Towards An

TV & Revolution





FORECAST: *For the next decade I predict an end to conferences, articles and letters-to-the-Editor devoted to the argument that Television has ruined Family life/Culture/Civilisation.*

Television is perhaps the major unappreciated force behind the political cataclysm of the past year. The sight of Western freedom and prosperity intensified the discontent of the people of Eastern Europe with dreary Communism; the attractive, powerful face of Gorbachev helped persuade the people of the West to end the Cold War. It was absolutely fitting that the Romanian revolution was led from the state television station in Bucharest. Television has made "ein Volk" of the human race.

Brenda Maddox
in THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

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Era of Cultural Vacuity?") accompanying George Urban's article, spoke of "a moral rebirth of nations" which, alas, is not taking place; and suggested that we in the Western democracies are "losing touch with our most profound roots". These are splendidly resonant concepts—and they are both nonsense. Nations and societies and systems do not experience "moral rebirth", a spiritual phenomenon—possibly illusory—which afflicts human beings, person by person. As Rebecca West put it, the destiny of the race is worked out through the individual, and not the other way round. If an Eastern European has come to believe that it *is* the other way round (which is what Marxism teaches), then the concept of choice becomes difficult to absorb into one's emotions. Freedom is seen in terms of "a system" rather than of choices; and it is then easy to suppose that the *existence* of "wall-to-wall *Dallas*, and round-the-clock sex from Copenhagen and Milan" condemns comfortable citizens of the Western World to a sort of cultural and moral damnation.

This is, of course, silly. We also have the equivalent of "wall-to-wall Radio 3"—excellent theatre, a richness of music, a certain amount of decent literature among all the trash—and the opportunity of making the kind of choices that open frontiers and a genuine electoral system offer to the citizen. None of the excellent political or cultural products of the West gives any guarantee of spiritual or moral salvation—whether or not we choose to consume some or all of them, appreciate them, patronise them; or to resist the imperative which says that they are best for our characters, minds and souls, and take up the "sleazy junk culture" instead. The point is that we have both, and we have the choice of either; and neither excludes the other, nor should it.

THE WEST does not exist in Eden but outside its gates, with everything that such a location implies—and that is the answer which George Urban should have given to his shocked Eastern European intellectuals. He might have added that their own common sense should have told them as much in the first place.

AUTHORS & CRITICS

Norman Levine is represented in *The Oxford Book of Canadian Short Stories in English* (1987) and in *86: Best Canadian Short Stories* (Oberon) by stories that were first published in ENCOUNTER. Among his other books are *Champagne Barn* (Penguin original, 1985), *From a Seaside Town* (1970), and *I Don't Want To Know Anyone Too Well* (1971). "Soap Opera" is the last story in his forthcoming collection *Something Happened Here*, to be published in hardback by Penguin Canada.

Dannie Abse, whose *White Coat, Purple Coat: Collected Poems 1948-1988* was published in 1989 by Hutchinson, is also the editor of the *Hutchinson Book of Post-War British Poetry*. He is the author of nine volumes of poetry and two novels, as well as two volumes of autobiography, *A Poet in the Family* (1974) and *A Strong Dose of Myself* (1983). His first new collection of poems for four years, *Remembrance of Crimes Past*, will be published by Hutchinson in June.

Stephen Watson is a lecturer in English at the University of Cape Town. He occasionally reviews books on South African affairs for *The Times Literary Supplement*, and is the author of two volumes of poetry. His *Selected Essays 1980-1990* will be published later this year in Cape Town by the Carrefour Press.

Geoffrey Wheatcroft writes weekly for the *Sunday Telegraph*, and is opera critic of the *Evening Standard*. A portrait of T. E. Utley is included in his book, *Absent Friends*, published last year by Hamish Hamilton.

Carolyne Wright, an American poet, was awarded a Fulbright Research Grant to complete her translation project. Having worked with West Bengali Hindu womem poets and writers in Calcutta, she is now in Dhaka, in Bangladesh, with the Muslim Bengali-speakers.

Stephen Wilson, a Fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, a hospital consultant, and Clinical Lecturer at Oxford University, has a psychotherapeutic practice in the city of Oxford. His previous contributions to ENCOUNTER were "Equivocal Death in George Eliot" (December 1988), and "Prejudice in Poetry" (July-August 1989).

Richard Lansdown was awarded a Ph.D. at University College, London, in 1989 for his thesis on Byron's historical dramas. Currently, he writes, he is "unemployed and facing an uncertain future in Sydney, Australia".

Max Beloff, Gladstone Professor of Government and Public Administration, University of Oxford, from 1954-74, and Principal of the University College at Buckingham, 1974-79, was created a life peer in 1981. His books include *Wars and Welfare, Britain 1914-15* (Edward Arnold, 1984), as co-author, *The Government of the United Kingdom* (Weidenfeld, 1985), and, most recently, *Dream of Commonwealth 1921-42* (Macmillan, 1989).

J. G. Links is the author of *Venice for Pleasure* (1966, new eds. 1973, 1979, 1984), *The Ruskins in Normandy* (1968), *Townscape Painting and Drawing* (1972), and *Travellers in Europe* (1980). He has also published several works on Canaletto and during the past four years has assisted in preparing the Metropolitan Museum's 1989-90 Canaletto exhibition, of whose catalogue he was part-author. He is now working on a book about 19th-century Venice.

Herb Greer is an American playwright and author who has lived in Europe since the early 1950s. His previous contributions to ENCOUNTER include "The News Managers", Who Censors What, Where & When", and "The Ethics of Fallible Journalism" (June, July-August, and December 1986), and "Embattled Images" (November 1987).

Malcolm Rutherford is Assistant Editor of the *Financial Times*.

Anthony Hartley, co-editor of ENCOUNTER, is the author of *The State of England* and *Gaullism: The Rise and Fall of a Political Movement*. He was editor of the monthly *Interplay* in New York and has served as a political analyst for many British newspapers.

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CONTROVERSY

The Catastrophe of Modern Theatre

On "Negative Culture"—By CURT RIESS

I AM IMPRESSED with the radical criticism which you have been featuring in your pages on the subject of contemporary style in the theatre, beginning with Melvin J. Lasky's "Towards a Negative Cultural Tax" and the comments thereon from Berlin, Vienna, and elsewhere (ENCOUNTER, April-December 1989). This is very necessary indeed, and not only for the German-speaking theatre. Many other cities in other countries exhibit the same malaise which is causing the theatre to lose its audiences in droves. At long last we have had an Anglo-American evaluation of the crisis which has been gripping the spirit of the Continental theatre for two decades—I congratulate ENCOUNTER for its initiative!

May I, in this spirit, go back to some of the turning-points in the story on which I have been reporting regularly? In 1966 I published in West Germany a critical and polemical volume entitled *Theaterdämmerung: oder das Klo auf der Bühne*. The subtitle referred to the "modern" staging of a play by Edward Albee, for which the theatre built a stage set with an extra-large lavatory, around which the plot revolved. Albee's representative in Europe took exception to the WC; nothing of the sort was in the text of Albee's play. The European director conceded that the WC had been "smuggled" into the production; he thought it would be a gesture to show how "socially critical" he was of contemporary reality. But the Albee play concerns ladies of good repute who, in order to earn some money for their hobbies (especially the garden), occasionally perform in the local bordello. Isn't that "socially critical" enough?

Twenty years later I tried again, with a critique called *Theater gegen das Publikum*. The point was that the current theatre, on its most ambitious (or serious, or avant-garde) stages, was being made not *for* the audience but systematically *against* it. No wonder that theatre-goers, even the most curious and open-minded, have been in full flight.

CURT RIESS, *who lives in Zurich, has been a theatre critic in Weimar Berlin and post-War New York. He has written biographies of the "Mephisto" career of Gustav Gründgens and of Wilhelm Furtwängler. Among his other books is a history of Occupied (and blockaded) Berlin and a history of the German Cinema.*

In the first place, there has been a basic change in the approach to the play. Where previously it was produced in the spirit in which it was written (the playwright's intentions, etc.), now it is played as the current producer wants to have it performed. Since we live in a publicity-afflicted age, where almost everybody wants to be famous for at least fifteen minutes, out of ten theatre directors, nine care little about the play and its creator; they are concerned almost exclusively with their repute—as measured by fame or notoriety. They want to be talked about, to "profile" themselves (as the insider phrase goes).

When it comes to contemporary plays there is a barrier, namely the possible objections of living authors, for copyright permissions have to be obtained and an "understanding" effected (as was not the case in the Albee affair). But the classics are not "protected", and they can be done in any way that an arbitrary fantasy dictates. Absolute liberty (read: absolute license) prevails here.

What, after all, is "a classic"? It is, simply put, a survivor. There were always, in "the old days", playwrights who were more popular than the names we are now familiar with; but they have long since been forgotten. A typical example in German literature is Herr von Kotzebue who wrote, in the time of Goethe and Schiller, over 100 plays and had more performances than most other playwrights put together—but who knows him today? Nobody remembers when the last piece was played. Goethe and Schiller are "survivors". And the same goes for Sophocles, Euripides, Molière, and above all Shakespeare. They wrote plays in bygone days that can still be produced and played. Why? The simple answer is that they deal with what we unfailingly recognise as "eternal problems"—because the problems of Oedipus or Othello or the *malade imaginaire* are still, in their classical way, with us.

THE SO-CALLED MODERN directors and producers see it otherwise. They are convinced they have to make the old plays "topical", to bring them "closer" to contemporary audiences, to play them in an "up-dated" style—indeed in what they call "modern dress", as if clothes make history. . . . What they will not see, or accept, is that they are thereby closing down sensitive access to those very "eternal problems" which made for the distinction of the literary work. Take Oedipus—who, at some time in the distant past (true even when the play was written), had a destiny that was credible. Nowadays, were he to wish to marry Jocasta he would

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have his attention called to the documentary fact, in the data-bank computer at City Hall, that his bride was his mother.

Or take *The Merchant of Venice*—an incredible piece of pure fiction, for where in the last 2,000 years has there been a court of law in which a creditor could sue for payment of a pound of human flesh? (I doubt, too, that there was ever any juridical legitimacy for a marriage contract involving a suitor who finds the right little box. . . .)

Lessing wrote the classic *Lustspiel* in German literature—*Minna von Barnhelm* (1767). It deals with the quest of a rich young woman who, accompanied only by her maid, tries to find in the destroyed land, crawling with bandits and other criminals after the Seven Years War, the young man she loves. This was all long ago, centuries in the past; but a Zurich producer set the story in 1946; that is, in the year after World War II. But with that almost everything in the play comes askew. The widow of a high-ranking officer appears and tells how she had to sell cavalry horses in order to settle her husband's debts; a scoundrel relates what he allegedly heard at the table of the King. . . . What horses? Which king? But the decisive imbalance is that in the ruins of 1946 there was not merely one courageous woman but hundreds of thousands searching for their menfolk. The gripping tale of a lone heroine in the tragic aftermath of a war several centuries ago has, when transplanted into other times and other ruins, lost its power to move, to interest, to persuade.

THE DRAMATIC IRRESPONSIBILITY doesn't lie only with the directors, but also with the literary advisers whom we call "*Dramaturgen*"; and they too are not only there for the beer. I recall the famous Max Reinhardt, a great man of European stagecraft, who at one time was running five separate theatres but had only a pair of *Dramaturgen* to advise him on what plays to pick for production. He was well-read enough in European literature to know for himself what classics he could turn to for the next season. Young, ambitious, bookish assistants were there to read through the piles of new manuscripts and spot what was worth considering. A good and balanced system—and how different from today when every metropolitan theatre in Germany (and there are almost a dozen) has at least five *Dramaturgen* on its staff, involving themselves in rehearsals even against the wishes and intentions of the director. Above all, it is they who prepare and edit the printed programmes which have been having an increasingly cultural-intellectual influence in the theatrical world. I don't recall in recent years having had a *Programmheft* in my hands of only 48 or 64 pages; mostly they run to about 100.

And what's in them? Recondite bits-and-pieces that these bright young men have looted from the nearby university library, sauced by ideological directions as to how to *really* understand the play and interpret the social conditions in which it was written—the school-boy Marxism of ageing Leftists who rarely had a new idea after the sloganeering days of '68. Almost everything is seen as leading to the next revolutionary situation, with all the "class contradictions" and Establishment "inauthenticity" that the so-called cultural crisis of the 17th or the 19th century entails. A page of quotations from Marx (with picture, and on fine glossy paper) supposedly makes even the latest English comedy from Shaftesbury Avenue clearer, if not funnier.

I often ask myself who is supposed to read all that stuff in the programmes—or, rather, when? Like most theatre-goers, I get to my seat four or five minutes before curtain time, and all I really want to know is who is playing what role. But that's the last thing one can find. And after the production—yet another of these faithless, witless transmogrifications—I really do not want to plough through what one

Vandalising the Bard

London

THOUGH *its public loves Shakespeare, the directors of the Royal Shakespeare Company clearly became bored with the Bard quite some time ago. Production after production, both at Stratford and the Barbican, looked as though they had been embarked upon by someone who, unable to duck the assignment, has decided to have fun by vandalising the play. When I jokingly announced in "The Daily Telegraph" last year the formation of what I called "the SSS" (Save Shakespeare from Stratford), I did not anticipate that so many readers would take me seriously and rush to join. "Membership", I wrote, "is free and open to all, including members of the Royal Shakespeare Company", and indeed among the hundreds of letters I received were several from actors who were either members or ex-members of the RSC.*

ONE ACTOR CLAIMED **that, while he was with the company, he was aware that, as often as not, the attitude of the director of a play was "What can we do with this bloody old warhorse?" Another actor who worked with the company in the 1960s complained that in recent years his visits to Stratford had "always resulted in terrible disappointment and outrage".**

THE ATTITUDE OF *many members of the theatrical profession to the kind of RSC Shakespeare production frequently encountered was expressed by no less distinguished a figure than Sir John Gielgud: "I can't bear the belief directors now have that they must impose their own academic ideas on to classic texts."*

Many complaints, both from the theatre-going public and from drama critics, concern the company's poor verse speaking. One correspondent demanded the right to hear Shakespeare's words spoken as though the actors understood and appreciated them.

IT IS, HOWEVER, **the staging of the plays that has given rise to the greatest concern, and led to fiercely critical articles by myself and by colleagues in other newspapers. A production of "Much Ado About Nothing" at Stratford in 1988, which was the worst I had experienced since I first made the acquaintance of the play 40 years ago, was the company's latest, and to date, most successful attempt to sabotage the playwright it was created to celebrate.**

Charles Osborne
in the DAILY TELEGRAPH *(London)*

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reader called "a prolegomenon to puerility". Well, of course, I am a professional and simply have to read them, even if they are superfluous and senseless. If the *Dramaturgen* have to earn their living that way, no wonder they are convinced that we all live in an alien and alienating society that has to be transcended.

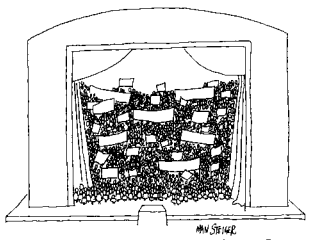
ONE OTHER CHARACTER appears in this search for the persons who have "revolutionised" the classical European theatre; and like all post-revolutionary arrangements he cries out for reform and "restructuring" (which means, in effect, the restoration of some of the old structures). He is the *Bühnenbildner*, the stage-designer, who has also come to the fore and sees to it that the set and the costumes are exactly what the play does *not* need. In Zurich I saw recently another Lessing play, *Emilia Galotti*, in which the first scene is set in the study of the reigning Prince. He sits behind his desk, but in the whole of the gigantic room—filling as it does the whole stage—there isn't a single other chair. Other personages just have to stand, or occasionally squat on the floor. Why? Any special reason? None, except that the stage-designer wanted to create an "effect", at least to do something with the furniture (or lack of the same) that hadn't been done before! I half thought I would soon hear a royal cry offering the kingdom for a horse, or a chair, or a couch . . . anything that one could sit on.

Or take the three scenes in Smetana's *Bartered Bride*, which I recently heard in a famed opera house that had imported a celebrated director from the East (the *DDR*, in fact). He required, in the first place, a whole new translation of the Czechoslovak libretto; he didn't like the German version which was the only one that had heretofore been used. What he didn't know was that there was no original Czechoslovak text! Smetana, who was part of the Habsburg cultural world, had composed the opera (in 1866) to a libretto by Max Kalbeck, who wrote it in German (which Smetana understood perfectly). Whatever one calls the new Zürich text which advertised itself as "a new translation", it remains an expensive undertaking, and royalties will be paid on the new copyright. . . . In addition it all sounded like foreign-language dubbing in a film synchronisation.

But back to Smetana's three scenes, originally very simple: *Bauernhaus*, *Wirtshaus*, and a street or a square (where a circus takes place). Not for our modern director and set-designer! They put it all on an intricate revolving stage, with some seventeen or eighteen separate scenes which resembled each other so closely we couldn't really make out where we were, or—more importantly—where the singers were. In the *Wirtshaus* scene the chorus brought along all the chairs and tables, set them up in a kind of furniture self-service, and began to wave their beer-mugs in harmonic togetherness.

Of Artistic Taste & Aesthetic Hunger

Tokyo



COMMENTING ON **his new production in Tokyo of Richard Wagner's "Parsifal", in a guest tour of the Vienna State Opera, the leading German director, August Everding, said in an interview: "I staged 'Parsifal' in its first performance about ten years ago, and it was all pointed toward the religious conclusion of salvation through the Cross. But I now had to ask myself what does the Cross mean to a Japanese audience? Was Wagner's opera a 'Christian' work? Salvation through saviours does not necessarily involve the idea of Jesus Christ. I therefore eliminated the Cross from the climax. I think that the Japanese who were viewing the opera for the first time brought to its appreciation a mixture of a general awareness of symbolism and religiosity, of Buddhist theology and Christian history, all of which made for receptivity. . . ."**

RETURNING TO *Munich where he usually produces plays and operas, Everding recalled his first staging of Mozart's "Magic Flute" and "Marriage of Figaro" in Communist China some years ago. One Chinese scientist who had seen the performances there recently visited Germany where, his appetite whetted for European music, he saw a production of Verdi's "Don Carlos".*

"In Essen my Chinese friend was thoroughly confused and confronted. What was going on? On the stage there were twenty singers, all equipped (or so it seemed from where he sat) with erect penises. He asked his neighbour, and she—perhaps discreetly—also didn't know what it all meant. He was also puzzled as to why balloons were floating around, and about the meaning of the background advertisements for 'Sony . . . Porsche . . . McDonalds'. He had come with the notion that Don Carlos was a figure in the European 17th century. But, open for every new experience in art, he tried to work out what was meant—for otherwise the director wouldn't have done it, would he?

"Well, my Chinese friend—and so many Europeans wouldn't have come to any other conclusion!—considered it all a vain and fruitless enterprise, and the next time wild Chinese dragons couldn't drag him into a similar performance. . . ."

EVERDING STRESSED **that "I am not talking about reactionaries and ignoramuses who stumble into a modern theatre and are shocked, surprised, alienated. No, I refer to cosmopolitan spirits who travel in the wide world and are open to new ideas and original ways of doing things. They often go to the theatre to 'learn' as well as to be 'entertained' . . . . But this phenomenon constitutes a challenge for us who work in the theatre. It has been unduly influenced by untheatrical intellectual spirits who, by now, ought to have become disenchanted with their outmoded ideas of ideology and socialism, and what the 'avant-garde' represented a generation ago. . . ."**

EMPHASISING THAT *he was not trying to impose limits and rules on artistic activity, and that every director, like every artist, must follow the dictates of his conscience, Everding concluded that art must not necessarily follow traditional notions of what is "palatable", but that new tastes should not go on starving audiences of real aesthetic sustenance.*

WELT AM SONNTAG *(Bonn)*

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Some pub! some scene! . . . And all in the interest of doing something different, something original, by which the chaps listed in the unreadable programme booklet could make a name for themselves. They also become more famous by spending more money. You should see the princely raiments each Prince wears on the stage, all hand-stitched for a princely sum.

I DISSENT from the conventional thesis that in Europe today "the crisis in the theatre" has been caused by Television's successful rivalry over the last decades. To be sure, millions of viewers would rather sit at home in front of their living-room screens than go out to look at a play in crowded mid-town. But many no longer go out simply because the theatre offers so little, and so rarely what will charm, enchant, stimulate, interest. Previously, if one read in the morning paper an announcement that *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*, or *Faust* would be performed that evening, one could actually go and see (more or less exactly, depending on the talents of the ensemble) the aforementioned play. Not so any more. What we get is some concoction brewed by the mixed alchemical talents of a director, a *dramaturg*, and a stage-designer, who all together (and each for himself) want to claim a chunk of that fifteen minutes of notoriety which might be theirs by tomorrow morning if only they put their inky personal stamp on every-thing. The less of Shakespeare or Molière or Goethe, the more for themselves!

In the old days the extraordinary disappearance of the theatre audience would have constituted a catastrophe, for most theatres were private enterprises, and there were rela-tively few state-subsidised ensembles. Opera was a differ-ent matter, for whereas actors can perform every evening, singers cannot; and opera houses need to have their own permanent staff of musicians, dancers, chorus, *et al*. This will always be so. But in theatrical history from Shake-speare to Max Reinhardt, the gifted entrepreneur lived from his box-office takings, and many of them accumulated for-tunes.

Nowadays nearly all theatres, especially on the European continent, are subsidised. This means, for those who are entrusted with running them—and here, especially, instant notoriety appeals as a civic factor to a city's or a state's cul-tural boss—financial independence from the income which derives from the sale of tickets to a curious audience. Some of our leading directors and producers have practically made an ideology of this—Peter Zadek, for example, has often said that what a theatre earns doesn't interest him *in the least*! Which might explain why he has presided over the near-bankruptcy of several civic institutions, currently the usually affluent Hamburg *Schauspielhaus*. Zadek is his own man, with strong convictions and even more powerful fan-tasies, and he says that if the people are not interested in the plays he puts on, or—which is more to the point—in the way he puts them on (in Melvin Lasky's article there was an account of Zadek's *Merchant of Venice* set in Wall Street, with Shylock as a Yuppie speculator), then the people just shouldn't come to his theatre.

Well, even with the greatest goodwill in the world—and Zadek enjoys it, for he was a German Jew whose family was forced to emigrate to England, and he came back to the Federal Republic to make his sensational career—disagree-able difficulties appear when, with his enormous salary plus expenses and guest commitments to do productions here, there, and everywhere (Vienna yesterday with Shake-speare, Berlin tomorrow with Alan Ayckbourn), the annual Hamburg budget explodes and disintegrates. The last the *Schauspielhaus* heard from him was a medical certificate from Florence, attesting to his indisposition (and his salary cheque should be forwarded to him).

THIS IS ONLY ONE CASE in, alas, many, proving the old adage (Garrick? Kean? Reinhardt?) that power corrupts and theat-rical power corrupts histrionically. Am I being naive when I entertain the hope that things would be different if plays and productions were made for audiences whom the players and producers actually *want* to attract to their theatres? I still have confidence in a new generation in European culture which will revive a sense of responsibility in our present free-for-all jungle of statist enterprise. Sad that Mrs Thatcher is too much of a middle-brow to like the theatre; she could do wonders for it.

The fact of the matter is that our state-subsidised theatres in their best years attract only around 10% of the tax-payers in the community—while obviously 100% of them actually foot the bill. Accordingly, I am thinking of a new—or indeed old—sense of responsibility to both the audience and to the public (for they are not identical). But our crisis, reduced to its barest outline, has set in because not even that 10%, call it privileged or an élite or whatever, is rushing to partake of "noble culture" which the enlightened patriarchs of the past thought so good for our souls (and for their own courtly prestige).

In my most recent tour of our theatres, which took me from Zürich to Berlin and back, I felt that I was almost the only person in the house who had bought a ticket on his own out of a kind of cultural free-will. Audiences mostly com-prised those patient and pious citizens who buy an annual *abonnement* and find themselves scheduled to attend on a Tuesday evening or a Saturday matinee, no matter what. I suppose it's a kind of professional feeling of duty that makes me stay to the end, to the dropping of the final curtain; but many of the paying customers could be seen taking flight during the intermission.

A notice by a well-known theatre critic in Berlin began: "Last night, at the première, more people left the theatre after the second act than had come for the opening curtain."

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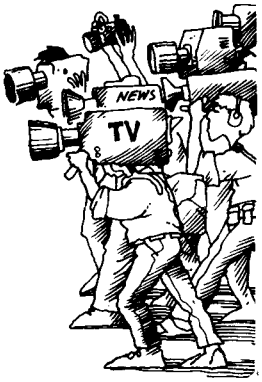
MEDIA

Of Humbugs & Sweethearts

By Herb Greer



THE MELODRAMA of a beleaguered media has become the media's favourite cliché. The suppressive villains in this scenario are always the same old scarecrows: the Government's (or Mrs Thatcher's) lust to censor freedom of speech, driven by an obsession with secrecy; the media barons; the Tory deregulation and the highest bidders for franchises, and so on. It is a well-fingered list, reviewed through the same old string of overblown scandals which is trotted out again and again to illustrate the "threat" to press and media freedom.

Last year pride of place was given to *Death on the Rock*, a news feature which presented, not a "trial", but an uncontested prosecution brief against the SAS and the Government on the charge of premeditated murder of IRA terrorists in Gibraltar. Part of the programme's "evidence" was later shown to be false, and the producer employed a reporter—Julian Manyon—who had already been censured by the IBA for lying about Czech dissidents. Public and official indignation over the rigged indictment was met by the producer's disingenuous denial that it was no such thing, but only an attempt to "discover new facts".

The Windlesham-Rampton Report on this seamy business reached the amusing conclusion that because the programme's material was obtained without the assistance of the authorities, its rank bias was acceptable. In a mealy-mouthed paragraph (no. 50, pp. 69-70) the authors of the Report tried to conjure up another shade of whitewash, asserting that although *Death on the Rock* "suggested a possibility that the terrorists had been . . . murdered", the programme did not "conclude" that this was so.

It was a typical conclusion to such affairs; the Report was much more concerned with protecting the license of the journalists involved than in discovering any possible wrongdoing. Other defenders of media blank-cheque "freedom" are also prone to deploy arguments that insult the intelligence. Sometimes this extends to direct insult of the public itself. One of the most prominent spokesmen to appear on television, smiling and declaiming against controls on the press and in favour of freedom for (but not from) journalists, is the Editor of *The Sunday Times*, Andrew Neil, who has righteously proclaimed that the media should be free to publish anything at all, if journalists are ready to take the consequences.

Mr Neil did not mention any consequences of media misbehaviour, but here are a possible few: terrorists are encouraged; national security may be endangered; private lives may be destroyed, military casualties caused by speculation, delicate diplomatic moves compromised, or the electoral process corrupted.

The chief characteristic of all these is that they do no personal harm to the journalists themselves. Indeed, it is often in the interest of a journalist to provoke such consequences, and excuse himself in the name of "doing my job". Whatever happens to any real victim, the careers of the reporter and editor inevitably benefit, in direct proportion to the outrage expressed by the authorities and the public. With terrorism in particular, this is connected to the fact that the journalist and the terrorist have an interest in common—which is the fundamental need to attract attention. If mutual satisfaction of that primal need happens to involve a certain amount of bloodshed, well (according to Andrew Neil's argument), that is just too bad. Controls which might prevent this are still denounced as a danger to freedom, and to democracy.[1] The only apparent criterion used by "serious" journalists is whether or not information might be embarrassing to the Government. If embarrassment is possible or likely, then the information—whatever it is, and whatever other ramifications it might have—must be exposed, and the devil take the hindmost.

On a very earnest BBC 2 chat show, *The State of Democracy* (on the evening of 6 July 1989), Andrew Neil inveighed against the idea that a government "élite" should decide about the publication of secret information. When it was pointed out that public opinion was in favour of controls on the media, Mr Neil—the fierce editorial champion of democracy—dismissed public opinion as "not that important". This may explain his profession's insistence that the elected government of a democracy should be supplanted in these matters by an unelected, self-appointed élite.

IT IS THE evident pleasure of these "freedom" campaigners to assume that a democratic government is somehow not answerable to the people through the electoral process at all, but only through the efforts of the media to expose any information—any information at all—which the journalist has decided to expose. It is axiomatic that the motives of the journalist must not be questioned and that any career benefit to him must not be revealed or weighed in the balance of motivation. The public is expected to take for granted that the journalist's career furthers the public interest; one must never explore the possibility that the reverse is true.

[1] It is worthwhile noting that many of these champions of freedom are the same people who, in discussions of deregulation and material which this might bring into the media, are in favour of "safeguards"—which on close examination turn out to be a form of official censorship.

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Another axiom concerns the nature of government. The journalist seems to believe—expecting the public to share the belief—that there is no difference between the rule of democratic government and that of the arbitrary, absolute, and unaccountable monarch of old. Without that assumption the demand of journalists for total discretion in matters of official secrecy, or indeed in any and all matters of publication, simply makes no "democratic" sense at all. In effect, by assuming the precedence of journalism over an elected government, this demand seeks to invalidate the voting public's commitment to the electoral process of our democracy.

THESE ISSUES are never broached in the now-common rituals of "Media Criticism", whether they occur in the press or on television programmes like *The State of Democracy*, other cosy late-night discussions chaired by the author Michael Ignatieff, or generally trivial compilations of press abuse like ITV's *Hard News*. Though plenty of adverse comment on the press has appeared in print, television has so far managed to avoid any serious examination of its own abuses, except in terms which invariably justify what happened. By a curious coincidence, the most commonly cited abuses parallel almost exactly the now-hackneyed series of incidents in which not only government or private action, but mere *comments* by government are supposed to represent "threats to freedom of expression".

Two of the most notorious "private" examples were the débâcle of *Maggie's Militant Tendency*, in which rigged "evidence" and mendacious implications brought down a libel action on the BBC, and the accusation that the BBC had censored *The Falklands Play* by Ian Curteis for political reasons. The latter affair was particularly disgraceful, exposing BBC officials to the suggestion that they were being very economical with the truth.[2] Not long after this embarrassment became public property, the BBC mounted a remarkably successful campaign which insisted that the play had been cancelled because of its "poor quality". This has now become a species of *idée reçue* in the British press whenever the affair is mentioned.

A different opinion, not widely circulated at the time or since, came from Lord Annan, Chairman of the Annan Committee on the Future of Broadcasting:

> "Some of the top brass of the BBC were devious and dishonest on that issue and displayed no more understanding of the ethics of broadcasting than an earwig."

The consequences for Curteis have been interesting. Until the *Falklands Play* affair he was one of the busiest playwrights on British television, but he has not received a single commission in this country since, and now earns his living primarily by writing for American television. As he says, "The watershed is clearly defined and unmistakable."

There would, of course, be no reason to condemn the transmission of any political view on either ITV or BBC, if the corporation concerned did not—as the BBC clearly has done—suppress or reject material because it does not conform to this line. It is significant that the most denounced examples of government "attacks against media freedom" in recent times have—if suppression was the aim—been spectacular failures, showing not the power of government as would-be censor, but its weakness. These *causes célèbres*—brought up again and again whenever this issue is raised in the media—include *At The Edge of the Union* (one of many BBC programmes to treat terrorists with sympathy); the *Zircon* spy—satellite affair; the heavily anti-American coverage of the attack against Libya (which was broadcast before any complaint was made, attracted an award for the reporter, and was supported in a second news feature a year later, more anti-American than the first); and, finally, the lopsided *Death on the Rock*, and the ban on broadcasting live speech by Ulster terrorists or their supporters.

In the face of massive evidence that both drama and feature reporting of news and current affairs are anything but impartial, journalists and other pro-media Jeremiahs cling to one particularly hilarious item of humbug. This is the recurrent accusation that a sinister and all-powerful government carefully manipulates television in order to brainwash the public into supporting Mrs Thatcher and her government.[3] Through the spring and summer of 1989 this accusation looked especially comic while commentators and news features both in print and on television marked Mrs Thatcher's tenth anniversary in power by cavilling at what she and her government have accomplished. With rare exceptions this avalanche of carping managed, so to speak, to golemise every stale anti-Thatcher complaint uttered in the last ten years, including her *soi-disant* "destruction of Britain's industrial base . . . wrecking the Health Service . . . spurning Human Rights . . . dividing the nation . . . favouring the rich . . . offending EEC governments"—and, of course, illiberal treatment of the media.

In the matter of manipulation the government actually has a great deal to learn from the journalists and dramatists working in television. Not only in news features but in "straight" reporting, the media line on Southern African affairs has for years been consistently and flagrantly pro-ANC and SWAPO, denigrating the movement of the South African Government toward reforms and clinging to the ritual announcement that their reportage is being broadcast "under restrictions imposed by the South African Government". No such caveat, so far as I know, has been made in connection with any other government, whether a Communist tyranny or even the Right-wing dictatorships of Latin America. The exceptions to this rule were the United Kingdom during the Falklands War, and the American invasion of Grenada, when complaints about censorship were prominent (and on these subjects, still are).

Media hostility to the Falklands War was evident during

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[2] See my "Embattled Images" in the November 1987 ENCOUNTER, which gives chapter and verse.

[3] See especially the bathetically titled British newsletter *Samizdat*, December 1988; also a "British" edition (September 1988) of the magazine *Index on Censorship*, which, in addition to the standard charge of manipulation, contains vague accusations that the government is suppressing media freedom and somehow impairing the cultural "mood" on which liberty depends. In the May 1989 issue of *City Limits* the TV dramatist G. F. Newman speaks of the "emotional right-wing bias of television", at a time when hours of prime time were being devoted to condemnation of Mrs Thatcher's record.

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the campaign itself, and has remained consistent—spectacularly so in the field of drama, underlined by a strongly anti-patriotic view of history. Following the *Falklands Play* affair, the continuing imposition of such a line on BBC drama was emphasised by a further experience of Ian Curteis. Invited to propose a play to commemorate the outbreak of World War II, he outlined a treatment of Neville Chamberlain which challenged the "standard sackcloth and ashes view" of the period, using instead the thesis that Chamberlain was trying to buy time for rearmament. His outline was sent to the BBC.

> "Immediately negotiations were broken off and letters and telephone calls both from my agent and myself to Jonathan Powell (by then head controller, BBC) and Mark Shivas (appointed head of drama group) went unanswered."

It transpired that the BBC was to celebrate the beginning of World War II by a "brutally frank" revelation about "Bomber" Harris. This play managed a neat bit of anti-Tory political slander by implying that the bombing of Dresden was a pet project of Churchill's; in fact that target was selected because of pressure from Stalin at the Yalta Conference.

THE MEDIA'S OWN TECHNIQUE of manipulation is not always as crude as mere prejudiced or politically bent programming. Interesting systems operate in both the BBC and ITV to ensure that a generally acceptable *status quo* is preserved even by nominally independent producers. At the BBC this works through what are called "sweetheart" contracts. The BBC informally approaches a writer who can be counted on to follow its approved line, and offers a commission—but not directly. The work is to be done for a nominally independent producer who just happens to be an ex-BBC man, possibly one of those who have in recent times been taking early retirement (in the knowledge that they had one or two years of work for the BBC ahead of them). Sometimes an in-house producer is used, "independent" for the nonce.

The consequent production is then mounted using BBC production facilities and is, in all but name, a BBC production. This procedure has the effect of radically reducing the 25% quota of genuinely independent work which is supposed to appear on the BBC. In new plays it also helps to ensure that where the subject permits they reflect the prevailing far-Left political view of the BBC drama group, which one independent producer has called "a law unto itself".

The independent television network has secured its own consensus through the "flexipool" system. No large production is possible without networking because of the expense, and networking is controlled by "the Big Five"—Granada, Thames, Central, London Weekend, and Yorkshire Television. Any independent producer wishing to reach a large audience must first get through a confidential meeting in which the other small producers approve his project. Once this approval has been secured, the project is submitted to the Big Five for networking approval. Without the approval of both groups it does not go ahead. The system means that one small company can exercise a veto on any project of which it disapproves for any reason, including politics.

The writers of the Left have been much more frank about what they are doing than their friends on the administrative side of television. Alan Bleasdale admits frankly that his historically distorted *Monocled Mutineer* was "a political piece to a degree", a cautionary tale about "the self-made man who gets on his bike and achieves things. . . ." More recently the BBC has continued to purvey a radically "Socialist" view of history with *Vote for Them*, whose co-author was the Trotskyist David Edgar.

This was a TV play about the suppression of a "mock Parliament" set up in 1943 by British servicemen stationed in Egypt; the proletarian rankers were all good decent fellows, while the officer classes were all fatuous, anti-democratic blimps or sinister types of a more or less fascist disposition. Edgar is not shy about his purpose in writing such stuff.

> "The government now has a country which has been transformed economically and politically, but which ideologically and culturally has remained remarkably committed to the ideas of the previous consensus. The issue of the cultural transformation of the people has become a vital one."

Edgar also gives aggressive approval to the notorious anti-American *agitprop* production *Airbase*, which in a docu-drama manner portrayed US airmen as quasi-psychotic junkies. This adaptation of a far-Left theatrical Fringe production, for which the BBC Chairman Marmaduke Hussey apologised to the American Embassy, is compared by Edgar to *The Satanic Verses*.[4] By implication this places those, Americans and British, who complained about the programme, on the same level as the murderous Ayatollah Khomeini—a delicious and characteristic blend of ideological self-pity and simple paranoia.

At this year's Edinburgh TV Festival, Channel 4 contributed to Edgar's enterprise with the première of *Resurrected*, yet another film which blackens the image of the British soldiers who recovered the Falklands, portraying them as sadistic monsters given to systematic bullying of the lower ranks, commanded by ineffectual officers who can or will do nothing to stop the brutality. This piece of *agitprop* was the work of Paul Greengrass, ghost-writer of *Spycatcher* and former researcher for ITV's *World in Action*. The film is a fictionalised account of Philip Williams, a Scots Guardsman who was "lost" after the battle of Tumbledown, accused of desertion, and acquitted, later leaving the service. In an exercise of what Greengrass called "cinematic licence", the film climaxes with Williams's trial at a kangaroo court and his "regimental bath" or mass beating—incidents which never happened to Williams.

This deliberate perversion of history outraged even the Labour MP Tam Dalyell, whose opposition to the Falklands

[4] These comments and the others quoted above appeared in "Remote Control", an article in the 25 May-1 June 1989 issue of *City Limits*. The writer, Teresa Allen, sees "radical [Left-wing]" TV drama as an endangered art. But she describes repeated triumphs for such drama. Dangers are mentioned, but these without exception are purely notional.

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campaign has been obsessive. Earlier in 1989, on the BBC's *Late Show*, Greengrass had appeared together with Angela Wait, the Keeper of Art in the Imperial War Museum, and Anthony Barnett. This solemn trio agreed that media treatment of the Falklands War was "a national exercise in heroic myth-making". True, of course, but not quite in the way that these commentators meant it. At the time of writing, Greengrass's film has been given cinema release, and it will be inflicted on television viewers some time this year.

DEREGULATION would help to loosen the grip which such ideologically vested interests have on the content of television through the "sweetheart" and "flexipool" systems. News-feature programming and television drama would be able to shed some of their current blinkers. In some alarm at the prospect, the present Media Establishment has mounted a loud and widespread campaign in the press and on television to oppose the reform. On the one hand inveighing against the supposedly evil intent of Mrs Thatcher's government to suppress the media, these champions of freedom are now discovered to be in favour of official "safeguards" which will "protect" the content of British television and keep the "quality" of programming—according to them—high. In classically Orwellian fashion, this will be achieved through statutory compulsion.

The independent producer Cherry Hughes is withering about this campaign. "These people", she says, "simply want to protect their jobs and the *status quo*." She believes that if deregulation does go through, it will actually improve the quality of British television programming. Another independent producer (who asked not to be named) pointed out that the old system, with its regulatory function of the IBA, had another advantage for producers, especially those among the Big Five who are faced with controversial material which they do not wish to transmit. In order to avoid the stigma of censorship, they are able to blame suppression of this material on the IBA.

The official line of media professionals, echoed by the National Union of Journalists, is that both choice and suppression (where this is necessary) not only of reportage, but of feature material, regardless of content, must be left exclusively to editors and journalists. Above all, the elected government must not attempt to influence or affect any material on the media, not even advertising for the purpose of communicating information on important public issues. Whatever the content or the public consequence of any broadcast—its effect on public morale, for instance, in time of war—for journalists, editors, and "freedom of information" lobbyists, it remains absolutely inadmissible that government should dispute or even comment on either a broadcast or its consequences, whatever these might be. Comment from the governing party of the day, such as Norman Tebbit's remarks on the BBC's warped Libyan reportage, is invariably construed as active suppression.

In fact, the most successful and genuine suppression of news and current affairs, and original dramatic material, has taken place within the media, carried out by the media administrators and journalists themselves.[5] This activity has invariably been obscured by strident, sometimes hysterical jeremiads against government "attacks". Was all the noise designed to obscure or cover up the media's own, much more effective battle against freedom of information?

The campaign against government proposals for offering ITV franchises to the highest bidder furnished a neat case in point late in 1989, when the BBC programme *Network* broadcast a virulent ten-minute propaganda film condemning the government proposal—without even a *pro forma* attempt at balance, and without telling viewers that this film had been made with BBC licence-fee money. The programme's subsequent discussion also touched on the Sinn Fein ban, as usual begging the most important question concerning terrorism and television: There is no general "freedom" of the media in the sense that the British public enjoy freedom of speech. What exists is a privilege of appearing on the media, highly restricted and narrowly controlled by a small, unelected, self-chosen, élite group of media professionals. By conferring this privilege on terrorists, the media élite—however the terrorists are "handled"—gives them an air of politically deserving the privilege; willy-nilly this casts a glow of legitimacy over terrorist propaganda and activity. This in turn helps terrorists to court and manipulate public opinion, and encourages their supporters.

That is what is meant by "the oxygen of publicity". It is easy to see why journalists deride this concept: it exposes all too mercilessly the common need of terrorist and journalist to attract attention. The ban which mitigates the destructive exploitation of this need is condemned by journalists, not because it truly infringes a non-existent media "freedom" but because it limits the licence of the media élite to play with the privilege of appearance as they wish. There are signs that the public are aware of this noisy hypocrisy, and that the present distrust of media journalists—already strong—will intensify. This is reflected most notably in public support for the ban and for the new "auction" arrangements for ITV.

Whether or not public opinion should take a dim view of the media élite and their chicanery, it is unlikely to affect either the arguments or the behaviour of media apologists. After all, we have the word of Mr Andrew Neil—not only a former television executive, but a leading newspaper editor, and of course a great democrat—that public opinion "is not too important".

[5] For cases in point see my "Who Censors What, Where, and When" in the July-August 1986 ENCOUNTER. For a detailed account of the BBC's censoring of *The Falklands Play*, during the research for which I was threatened by the BBC with court action, see "Embattled Images" in the November 1987 ENCOUNTER. The examples of media censorship by the media cited in these articles were at the time they occurred either passed over in stonewalling silence, or, as in the case of the *Falklands Play* affair, aggressively defended in terms which frequently departed from the truth. A more recent example was the BBC's censoring in January 1990 of a television programme criticising Radio 3, after the Controller of Radio 3 threatened to resign if the criticism was broadcast.

When the Archbishop of Canterbury asked for the suppression of a BBC programme in the series *Bylines* at the end of July 1989, the protests were notably lacking in the violent indignation directed against requests by the government that programmes like *Death on the Rock* or *At the Edge of the Union* should be postponed. There were no protests at all from the media unions.

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THEATRE

Romeo & Arthur Miller

Of Inspiration & Effort

By Malcolm Rutherford

I WENT TO see the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of *Romeo and Juliet* at The Pit, the small theatre in the Barbican Centre, just after the official announcement that the company is withdrawing from London for four months from next November in an attempt to reduce its losses. Then I went to see Arthur Miller's *The Price* at the Young Vic, also a small theatre, though not part of a large complex. Just before those visits, Sir Peter Hall gave the annual *Financial Times* Arts Lecture—oddly enough in a cinema in the Barbican. Sir Peter is unusual in that he directs both opera and drama. He can be irritatingly perverse, but this was a straight-down-the-middle, best-behaviour lecture about his experiences of both. He talked about paradoxes. How is it, for example, that opera can be both popular and élitist? It is necessarily élitist, he said, because it is expensive to produce:

> "And because it is necessarily élitist, it is thought by some people to be socially undesirable, and by others it is thought to be socially flattering."

My own thoughts are about the random nature of art. How is it that some productions work and others don't? Do subsidies, patronage, pricing policies, the maintenance of permanent companies, or even the shape of the stage have anything directly to do with it when a production occasionally ignites?

The Pit was full for the performance of *Romeo and Juliet* (the theatre takes only about 240 people). Some, who had turned up on spec, were unable to get in. It costs £11.00 per ticket and you choose your own seat (not that it makes much difference where you sit: the view is equally good). There will always be an audience for *Romeo and Juliet*, perhaps especially if it is performed by the RSC. Schoolchildren see it because it is likely to be one of their set texts, tourists like it, and there are also incurable romantics who want to see it whenever it is staged. No production is ever quite the same. There should be special rates for schoolchildren, to be sure, possibly out of the education rather than the arts budget. But I wonder if £11.00 is not a case of underpricing for the rest.

I also wondered whether *Romeo and Juliet* is the right play to put on at The Pit. It is a drama that deserves space, style and colour. True, the Pit production used the available space to the full. The fights and the ball were very good; so, too, was the final tomb scene. But there was a great deal else that was perverse. Sir Peter Hall said in his lecture that sometimes directors over-indulge their own subjective fantasies. "It's pleasant, sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't." He added that, when it doesn't work, ". . . no great harm is done because the piece is still sitting there laughing at you if you've made a fool of yourself". *Romeo and Juliet* can survive a lot of bad direction.

Besides, even inferior productions can provide new insights. This one has several. For instance, it plays up the initial little-girlishness of Juliet. When she enters the ball scene—shortly to have her first encounter with Romeo—she is being carried piggy-back, like a child being introduced at her parents' party before she goes off to bed to let the grown-ups get on with it. She has seemed just as childish and giggly in her first scene with the Nurse. She matures instantly when she meets Romeo. Mercutio, on the night I went, was played by a coloured actor. Whether this was deliberate casting or not, I do not know: a programme note said that he was a stand-in. But it did have the marvellous effect of setting him aside from the Montagues and the Capulets: someone who could rightly say, when he was killed: "A plague o' both your houses." There is also a breath-takingly long pause between Romeo saying at the foot of the balcony: "And I'll still stay to have thee still forget, Forgetting any other home but this", and Juliet's response: "'Tis almost morning." It is almost a consummation in itself, and it works.

NEVERTHELESS, perversities abound. Sir Peter Hall talked in his lecture about the need for every production, opera or drama, to have some period reference and to avoid playing totally against the text and original setting. In that context, this production is nondescript: no period, no style. Juliet's hair looks as if it needs a shampoo—perhaps a sign of the RSC's dwindling resources. Benvolio's hair has more than a touch of a bird's nest about it. The Nurse is dressed like a Nurse and Friar Laurence like a Friar, but the rest of the cast might just as well be dressed in some rather colourless pyjamas: indeed, perhaps are. What, one wonders, is the point of that? Verona, after all, was neither a poverty-stricken nor a puritanical city.

It was plainly not an uneducated place either, at least in Shakespeare's play. The people were articulate, from the servants upwards. Romeo and Juliet themselves speak in some of Shakespeare's best verse, as befits the educated upper middle class. It is therefore odd not to let Romeo (Mark Rylance) make full use of it. The part is played as if he wished he were speaking the lines in prose: more like a

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mixed-up kid from *West Side Story* than a proud Montague. But perhaps the RSC is not alone in this interpretation. My thirteen-year-old daughter had to write an essay the next day on "Is Romeo a strong or a weak character?" You could ask that about Hamlet. About Romeo it is irrelevant. His character scarcely develops. He is, as he says himself, "Fortune's fool".

What does develop is the verse. Romeo and Juliet in love speak quite differently from anyone else in Verona, almost—though there are overlaps—from any other couple in Shakespeare. "I am no pilot", says Romeo, "yet wert thou as far/As that vast shore wash'd with the farthest sea,/I should adventure for such merchandise." Juliet's maturity is even more striking. She speaks in imperatives: "Come night, come Romeo, come, thou day in night!/For thou wilt lie upon the wings of night,/Whiter than new snow on a raven's back." That is the guts of the play: poetry as drama, almost opera. It is a pity that neither the schools in their examination questions, nor the RSC, see it wholly that way. In passing, there is one perversity in Shakespeare himself. I had forgotten until I looked it up, but the sources on which he drew had Juliet as a sixteen-year-old. It was Shakespeare who reduced her to not yet fourteen. There is no obvious reason. Even allowing for changed times, Shakespeare's Juliet would be more convincing if we knew that she were slightly older.

I WENT to *The Price* with some reservations, not only because the previous Arthur Miller show at the Young Vic—*Two-Way Mirror* last year—had been so pretentiously awful. There was also the thought that if Miller had written such a good play in 1968—the date of *The Price*—why had we not seen it before?

In fact, *The Price* is a revelation. It is about the children of the stock-market crash of 1929, set in New York in 1964. A lengthy programme note by Christopher Bigsby, Professor of American Literature at the University of East Anglia, should be discounted. Bigsby writes that it is all about holocaust, survival, and grace, coupled with Miller's introduction of a sympathetic Jewish character into one of his plays for the first time. There is no need to see *The Price* in these apocalyptic terms. It is a play where adults talk to adults: indeed, if one wanted to attach it to a school, it might belong to the best of Harley Granville-Barker.

There are only four characters. Two brothers have not seen or talked to each other for sixteen years. One of them left home—after the millionaire father almost went bankrupt in the crash—and became a millionaire surgeon. The other stayed at home, gave up science, which he loved, to look after the father and became a run-of-the-mill policeman. He is married, coming towards retirement, and short of money. He decides to sell the old family possessions, some of which, like a harp and an old chauffeur's fur wrap, turn out to be remarkably grand. The rich brother comes back—dramatically—in the middle of the sale. The policeman's wife and the Jewish property-valuer, called in to name a price for the heirlooms and remnants, are the other two characters. They talk, quarrel, and talk again: between them they argue rivetingly as the past is revealed, some of it true, some of it perhaps not. Rarely have I seen a packed audience so hooked. And there is no set conclusion.

SO ONE RETURNS to some questions. Why has a play so good so seldom been seen in London before? Why does Arthur Miller write sometimes so well and sometimes so badly? How does it come to turn up in the relatively impoverished setting of the Young Vic? Certainly *The Price* does not suffer from being performed in the round, as at the Young Vic, but it would grace any stage, any shape, in the West End, and one hopes it will. People would pay real, unsubsidised, money to see it.

Sir Peter Hall spoke in his lecture of the main constraints being "time, pressure, and money". "Time" because to do something well needs a lot of practice and rehearsal. But time also means money, because if performers spend too much time on one thing, they could be losing the opportunity to make money from something else. And all the while they are under pressure to move on.

Hall made two other points specifically about opera. One was the shortage of new works being added to the repertory. The second was the shortage of good singers: those who can act as well as sing, play in a company as well as go solo, and with the time, concentration and will to get the whole show right. He might have made the same points about theatre. There are not all that many good new plays, and even the good old plays are not always well done. What struck me as interesting was that he did not insist that the answer was more state subsidies. The process is random. It depends on a mixture of inspiration and effort. Money also matters, whether paid through the state or directly at the box-office. A modest conclusion is that we have not yet found the right formula. Maybe there isn't one.

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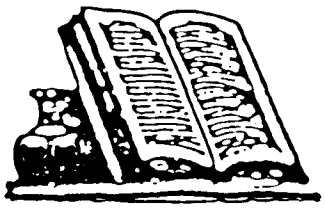
IN THE MARGIN

On William Pfaff

Barbarian Sentiments & Civilised Advice

By Anthony Hartley



ONE OF THE MOST frequently used American quotations is Henry Ford's statement that history is "bunk". History has had its revenge on Ford—he is now so much raw material for the discipline he scorned—but not before he had found imitators in Europe. History, its study and its lessons, are despised by the new Prometheans, whose heavenly fire is the green flicker of the computer, and whose attention is absorbed by the facts with which they themselves have programmed their servant. Narcissus, indeed, is the appropriate symbol for those who gaze endlessly into the screen/pool and find in it only their own image.

Most Europeans, however, still keep some history at the back of their minds. English schoolchildren learn about the battle of Trafalgar, and French ones can tell you about "*les journées de Juin*" or "*18 Brumaire*". Recently, there has also been something of a revival in the history of other parts of Europe. To understand events in the Soviet Union we have to learn something about the past of Armenia or the customs of Uzbeks and Tadjiks. Islam has been called to our attention by a series of puzzling and not always agreeable events. History is everywhere—in our newspapers, beneath our feet, and behind our brows.

In America, however, things are different. A thoughtful American historian, Richard Hofstadter, made the point: "Time is the basic dimension of history, but the basic dimension of the American imagination is space." History in America has a short span, dating only from the 17th century. Before that everything is ethnology.

> "What we do have as a substitute for a historical conception of this span of time is a series of tableaux, of timeless frozen vignettes, each one of which seems to establish a moral or convey a message."[1]

History, if not bunk, is a blast on the moral trumpet, a sermon in politics, with none of the relativism that attends the study of peoples with different institutions and habits of thought.

Yet Americans are deeply influenced by their own history and the not always explicit conclusions they have drawn from it. Historical tradition surfaces in present-day American society in ways that are not immediately apparent. Take, for example, the attitude of Americans towards lawyers and the law. An American reaches for his lawyer with a rapidity that never fails to astonish Europeans. Indeed, a legal adviser plays something of the role once assigned to the hired gun on the Wild West frontier. A frontier-style readiness to resort to self-defence or aggression—in practice the two are not readily distinguished—lives on in litigation.

Moreover, even today in the United States the fetters of an excessive constitutional legalism are easily cast off. Just as the sheriff-hero of a Western is willing to break a law, usually perceived as corrupt, to clean up Dodge City, so the "rogue cop", who deals out his own brand of justice in the jungle of the inner city, has become a cult figure (usually played by Charles Bronson). Within a bureaucracy it is the man who breaks the entangling rules to get something done who is applauded by his boss. He is "a good staff man"—by definition aggressive and unscrupulous. All this stems from the history of a legalistic system where any hesitation in breaking through hampering laws results in impotence.

The history of the United States also affects its foreign policy. The most obvious and well-known instance is Washington's warning against "entangling alliances" which, for a century-and-a-half, provided a traditional rationale for American isolationism. But even since that taboo was broken, America's conduct as a world power has been deeply influenced by historical factors. The "action-man" rhetoric of the Kennedy administration, the preference for technical solutions to political problems (e.g., the ill-fated multilateral nuclear force proposal in the 1960s) and the impatience with long-term diplomacy or the watch for a moment when solutions become possible—all this bustling, problem-solving approach to the complexities of international politics is explicable as the inheritance of a nation which pioneered across a continent, sustained by a faith in "manifest destiny" and its own utilitarian energy.

AMERICAN POLICY-MAKERS have not always been conscious of the effect of their own history. Equally, they have ignored the history of others. The conflicting nationalisms and inveterate feuds of Europe not only seemed to them absurd (which they were), but also meaningless (which they were not). It is naturally hard for the inhabitants of a country conceived on a continental scale to understand the emotional impact of relatively minor contentions between states crowded into the narrow European space. Eastern Europe now reminds anyone who needed reminding that rationality does not always accompany democracy and that the neat blueprints of policy-planners are always smudged by national passions. But history, if we read it, would already have taught us that politics is an irrational activity.

For a long time now William Pfaff has made it his business to correct the misapprehensions of his fellow-Americans

[1] Richard Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, Parrington* (Vintage Books, 1970).

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and, in particular, to demonstrate to them that not everyone in the world is like themselves and that a foreign policy based on this assumption is bound to end badly. His first book (written with Edmund Stillman and published in 1961) began on a sombre note: "Our policies are failing and our influence in the world is shrinking."[2] The reasons for this were not far to seek. American egalitarianism sees the world as one and denies the differences between its parts. Moreover, "the need to see the world as a unitary phenomenon became fused with our preferences for quasi-ethical causes. . . ." A taste for moralising lies at the root of the problem:

> "For in a certain and significant measure America has substituted politics for religion as the means for human fulfilment and transcendence. Our international politics are understood as making a world in which the ills of history will have been cured and a literally inhuman order and tranquillity will prevail. . . ."

Shades of Francis Fukuyama! This anticipation, some 30 years ago, of his apotheosis is an impressive piece of prescience. But the whole book had much to say which foreshadowed the future—the Nixon/Kissinger discovery of a "multi-polar world", for example, and (just after the publication of W. W. Rostow's *Stages of Economic Growth*) the reflection, banal now, that industrialisation could disintegrate the societies of Third World countries. It was a brilliant criticism of conventional wisdom, though its effect was diminished by the rather hectic style in which it was written.

Since then Mr Pfaff has become a well-known—possibly one of the best-known—American columnist dealing with international affairs. He was an opponent of the Viet Nam War, much in sympathy with de Gaulle in the latter's criticisms of America's ecumenical world policy, and a firm believer in the importance of Europe to the United States. His most recent work, *Barbarian Sentiments*,[3] centres around an analysis of the present relationship between America and Europe at a time when this is being complicated by the collapse of the Soviet system of client states in Eastern Europe and stormy upheaval in Russia itself.

Much of Mr Pfaff's book is descriptive. As such it is very useful. Too much of so-called "policy-oriented" writing on international affairs merely tells the reader what Professor *X* or Dr *Y* would do, were they National Security Assistants to the President, rather than recounting facts—facts to which the "power" intellectuals' prescriptions often stand in flagrant contradiction. Such contradictions can only be resolved by the methods of Procrustes, lopping off a piece of reality here and stretching a conjecture there. It is worth noting that these bad habits have spread to Europe; much of the discussion about the European Community, for instance, is conducted with little, if any, attention being paid to what it really is and how it works in practice. Mr Pfaff's account of European politics, however, is firmly based on history, and consequently enlightening. Only when he gets to Germany does he falter, declaring categorically that it will remain divided:

> "The basic problem of Europe from 1871 onwards was how to deal with this unified, disproportionately powerful Germany. The answer finally was found in 1945, at great cost. It was to redivide Germany. This, almost certainly, will prove an irreversible verdict, as far as the future can be foreseen."

As late as last April he was writing in his column that "international stability requires that Germany remain divided" and appealing to the West German government "to renounce the goal of German unification" (*International Herald Tribune*, 26 April 1989).

EVENTS HAVE NOW GIVEN their own judgment on this issue, and many others were wrong as well as Mr Pfaff. But it remains surprising that anyone so familiar with the strength of nationalism should have made this mistake. Surely it was always obvious that, the moment East Germany was released from Soviet pressure and evolved towards liberalisation, reunification was by far the most likely result? That "international stability" and "the balance of power" within the European Community may suffer in consequence is perfectly true; but the passage from one system of European politics to another must necessarily be disturbing. Stability is not always an argument that can effectively be made against a plea for justice—nor is there any good reason why Germans should be denied the self-determination made available to other nationalities. Successive generations cannot eternally be held as scapegoats for what occurred half-a-century ago.

Gorbachov's new European policies, and what has happened in East Europe because of them, have emptied the present European Security system of content, and we must seek to construct relationships that correspond more closely to the present facts. After all, this kind of thing has happened before. It is possible to wish that Metternich's Holy Alliance and Concert of Europe had lasted into the second half of the 19th century; but this would not have spared us Bismarck and the creation by Prussia of a German *Reich*. An international system, useful in its day, becomes an encumbrance if it lasts too long. Statesmen cannot shut their eyes to change simply because it causes them inconvenience.

Mr Pfaff's sudden departure from reality over the German question is due, I suspect, to his obvious prejudice in favour of France and French policies. He prefers a Catholic Europe, which is ready to be awkward with the United States, to a Protestant Europe which is not; and France, in the person of de Gaulle, has been the great example of such

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[2] Edmund Stillman and William Pfaff, *The New Politics: America and the End of the Postwar World* (1961).

[3] *Barbarian Sentiments: How the American Century Ends*. By WILLIAM PFAFF. Hill & Wang, $19.95. The title derives from the Chinese maxim of Wei Yuan:

> "In order to handle barbarian affairs, you have to know barbarian sentiments. . . . In order to know barbarian sentiments, you have to know barbarian conditions."

Wei Yuan, member of the "Grand Secretariat of the Manchu Court" (and one of the founders of Western learning in China), was introducing a collection of documents on Europe published shortly before the First Opium War (1839).

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awkwardness. Since French diplomacy, with its national egotism and realism, appears as the antithesis of the moralism of the United States, anyone critical of American actions is bound to be seduced by it. Indeed, in the 1960s it was the fashion for American commentators to use Gaullist policy as a stick with which to beat the State Department "Atlanticists". In a contest between Talleyrand and Woodrow Wilson it is clear which is the more attractively sophisticated choice. Mr Pfaff concludes his book by suggesting that, after 50 years of global power and strenuous employment as the manager of world affairs, a more restricted definition of America's national interest would not come amiss. He believes that "isolation could be good for the country", though he doubts whether the will for thorough domestic reconstruction of the United States exists.

William Pfaff's recommendation of an old-style diplomacy, conditioned by history and acting slowly and cautiously, is certainly a sensible antidote to the naive activism and impatience for results which, in the past, have damaged the execution of America's good intentions. But it cannot have escaped his notice that, at the present time, events seem to be confirming some of the ideas to which critics of the American style most vigorously object. The idea of appealing to *peoples* against *governments* is not one on which a stable structure of international relations can be founded. Yet it is a logical deduction from the Jeffersonian view of government itself. Such an approach to foreign policy carries with it the implication that, though governments may be recalcitrant, peoples are yearning to adopt American democracy, economic liberalism, and an ecumenically moral view of world affairs.

Mr Pfaff and most Europeans would reject such principles as examples of precisely that moralism which has vitiated so much of American policy. Yet events in Eastern Europe have illustrated those principles by showing how peoples can take government into their own hands.

There is, indeed, a flash of Jeffersonian vision about what has happened in Berlin or Prague. The ideological judgment of events—Western democracy is right and Soviet Communism is wrong—seems to have been borne out by the dislike with which the inhabitants of Eastern Europe now seem to regard their erstwhile rulers. "The Evil Empire" has collapsed like a house of cards, and, if something is owing to the collaboration of Mr Gorbachov, who can prevent what has taken place from being regarded as a victory for the forces of righteousness headed by the United States? Even the much-abused Ronald Reagan has his part in the success—"Star Wars" increased the pressure for change on the Soviet Union quite as effectively as his administration had hoped.

Barbarian Sentiments was written before these changes in Europe came about. But I imagine Mr Pfaff would still stick to his criticism of the moralistic strand in American foreign policy, demanding something more subtle in its place. No doubt, he would be right. If ever a prudent and realistic policy was required of the United States, it is in Europe today. In Eastern Europe and within the Soviet Union itself the people may be taking power into their own hands. But it will not stay there, nor will the gains in terms of personal freedom be permanent unless some new system of European security can be found which avoids the dangers of anarchy or the release of national emotions in internecine conflict. However, such a structure will not be created in terms of a simple celebration for "the victory of Western democracy", gratifying though this may be. Something more detached, something more wily even, will be required.

Sir Michael Howard has written of the need for "another Congress of Vienna" to bring some clarity into the present European confusion. Perhaps the European Security Conference, which will take place later this year, will provide a forum for this. There the requirement will be for a diplomacy which can strike a balance between diverging national interests and apprehensions, thus providing, not solutions, but compromises. For the achievements of diplomats are not triumphs of good over evil, to be depicted in black and white, but limited agreements where shades of grey mark the nuances.

In a way, the opening-up of Eastern Europe is a reversion to earlier currents of history. In the Balkans old feuds have been smouldering away—Bulgar versus Turk, Serb versus Albanian—and are now reappearing. Germany seems likely to dominate an economic community—stretching from Helgoland to the Bosphorus, from Lisbon to Lublin—whose shape was already "under discussion" before 1914. It will also resume its traditional role of a broker between East and West. American policy seems set for an immersion in the European past, with its emergent enmities and buried veins of national prejudice. The difficulties of dealing with what might be called the "re-Balkanisation" of Europe may be such as to tempt the United States to wash its hands of European responsibilities and gradually withdraw to cope with the problems that abound at home and south of the Rio Grande. Yet America's part in the coming European settlement remains essential, and stability in Central Europe will hardly be secured without a continued US military presence somewhere on the old continent.

I think American leaders may find Mr Pfaff's book of help to them in their future travails. If the US is to continue to consider Europe as a priority—and President Bush and Secretary of State Baker say that it will—then Mr Pfaff has plenty of implicit advice on how to conduct European policy. But perhaps *Barbarian Sentiments* should not be read—or heeded—right to the end. It is something of a paradox to argue the importance of Europe and then conclude with a half-hearted recommendation of a new isolationism.

Still, if Mr Pfaff appears to contradict himself, that is simply a sign of the present confusion as the realisation that history has turned a corner sinks in. His departure from lucidity is simply one effect of the flickering kaleidoscope that has currently been dazzling us all.

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LETTERS

"Quote . . . Unquote"

HUGH TREVOR-ROPER quotes ("Aftermaths of Empire", ENCOUNTER, December 1989) Hitler's Secretary-of-State, Ernst von Weizsäcker, as saying that "Great historical changes cannot be carried out without a certain amount of crime. . . ."

Von Weizsäcker was merely rewriting Hegel, who in *Reason in History* said: "A mighty figure must trample many an innocent flower underfoot and destroy much that lies in its path." And then, of course, there is Karl Marx. . . .

And while we're on the subject of quotations, in the same issue *M* cites the poet Agathon as saying that "Even God cannot change the past". The Samuel Butler variation runs: "God though he is omnipotent cannot change the past. Therefore, he created historians."

ARNOLD BEICHMAN

Stanford
California

Hitlerites & Stalinists

I AM troubled by George Urban's interview with Hugh Trevor-Roper ("When Empires Collapse", December 1989). Urban asks:

> "But do you think our own politicians might have extended the same friendly welcome to a de-Hitlerising, 'restructuring' Nazi leader as they are now extending to the de-Stalinising Gorbachov?"

Trevor-Roper didn't seem to have any problems with that, but I would think some of your readers might. It is one thing to equate the Holocaust and Nazi war crimes with the victims of Stalin's purges and forced migrations. It is quite another to say that "the de-Stalinising Gorbachov" should be regarded much as Nazi apologists who had won World War II. It is an outrageous historical assumption, and the kind of "revisionism" that one would not expect to find in ENCOUNTER.

At the very least, in the Soviet Union, a new generation of leadership has separated itself from Stalinism and is trying to atone for his crimes. But should the tremendous changes unleashed by Gorbachov be equated solely with his having inherited Stalinism? George Urban seems to think so, wondering whether Margaret Thatcher or Ronald Reagan wouldn't have run happy Summit meetings with a post-War Nazi apologist "in the same way they have done with Gorbachov".

Was this the same War you and I were in? Had the Germans won the War, how much would it have mattered whether, and how, the Nazis rationalised their war crimes? There is a lot of loose history running around in that interview.

SIMON BOURGIN

Washington, D.C.

Sherrington's Man

I WRITE concerning the article by Dr T. D. Rogers, "A Loose Wheel Spinning", that you recently published (September-October 1989). Dr Rogers gives a distorted view of Sherrington's philosophy as it was expressed in his great work *Man on his Nature* 50 years ago.

By selective reference to Sherrington's text, Rogers aims to establish Sherrington's belief that "Mind is the inevitable pouring forth of experience which results from the normal working of the intact human brain". This led up to Rogers's assertion that "mind is a function of the brain".

Though Sherrington flirted with such materialist ideas early in his book, he comes in later chapters to a dualist belief—mind and the energy concept—that was very strongly expressed.

> "Our concept of energy affirms it as something complete in itself. A self-contained cycle which has no crevice for interpenetration by anything else, let alone mind. Similarly our concept of mind excludes energy, for the nature of its own content is non-sensual."

He reaffirms this in a splendid conclusion:

> "Mind, for anything perception can compass, goes therefore in our spatial world more ghostly than a ghost. Invisible, intangible, it is a thing not even of outline; it is not a 'thing'. It remains without sensual confirmation and remains without it for ever. Stripped to nakedness there remains to it but itself. What then does that amount to? All that counts in life. Desire, zest, truth, love, knowledge, 'values', and, seeking metaphor to eke out expression, hell's depth and heaven's utmost height. Naked mind. . . . And that other concept, energy; what of its yield? We saw that Time has winnowed its harvest too. How much remains? The perceptible world. All that the space-time continuum contains. . . . Between these two, naked mind and the perceived world, is there then nothing in common? They have this in common—they are both concepts; they both of them are parts of knowledge of one mind. They are thus therefore distinguished, but are not sundered. Nature in evolving us makes them two parts of the knowledge of one mind and that one mind our own. We are the tie between them. Perhaps we exist for that."

At the close of his book Sherrington expressed belief in a wholly impersonal Deity and proposed an austere Natural Religion based on Truth, Beauty and Charity, as mentioned by Rogers.

Sherrington's dualist position with a dominance by mind aroused much criticism by the materialists who detected a latent religiosity. It was the period of the Vienna Circle and the logical positivists. On the two occasions when I visited him in late February 1952, Sherrington discussed with evident distaste the criticisms that were published at the time of the second edition in 1951 of *Man on his Nature*. He believed, as did I, that the critics were denigrating human beings because of their dogmatic materialism. His mind was as bright as ever, but he was terribly crippled by rheumatism. Some of his last words to me were: "Jack, for me now the only reality is the human soul." He died unexpectedly a few days later on 3 March 1952.

Dr Rogers's article reminds me that this year is the 50th anniversary of the publication of *Man on his Nature*, and

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that Schrödinger acclaimed in 1958 "The grandeur of Sherrington's immortal book."

SIR JOHN ECCLES

Contra
Switzerland

I HESITATE to cross swords with Sir John Eccles over a matter like this. Sherrington was indeed criticised for what was seen as his advocacy of dualism, but to the modern reader it is surprising that this should be so. *Man on his Nature* achieves two things: it is a triumphant affirmation of man's biological nature, and it is an exploration of the relationship between brain and psyche. On the latter point, the assertion that "mind is a function of brain" is not mine alone. Sherrington writes:

> "Much as one special organ, the heart, maintains the flow of nutriment throughout the body, so one organ, the brain, is provider of mind for the whole individual. If we smile at so bald a statement we must yet agree that it states the practical situation with which the physician and the surgeon deal."

I agree with Sir John that the cool reception which greeted the publication of *Man on his Nature* stems from the scientific Establishment's mistrust of the religious ideas expressed in the closing chapter. Yet, strangely, that chapter now seems to invest the book with much of its power and beauty.

T. D. ROGERS

Edinburgh

Flight from Reality?

STEPHEN WILSON in your issue of July-August 1989 ("Prejudice in Poetry"), citing a letter of mine to *The Times Literary Supplement*, publicly exhibits me as a post-modernist who alleges that "now we are *all* 'Jews', *all* uprooted . . . in contemporary society what writers say matters not a whit".

But the letter, of which Mr Wilson can hardly have read one word in ten, alleged something quite different—that we cannot intelligently discuss the cultural anti-Semitism of Eliot and others of his time without recalling:

> ". . . a plain sociological fact, that in struggling with the problems of emerging from the Ghetto into a suspicious and hostile world the Jews have made a contribution to modern sensibility, from high art and thought to low entertainment, which is out of all proportion to their numbers. Nowadays we can be grateful for the richness of Jewish genius; being all more or less uprooted ourselves, we can recognise that the most uprooted of all have been doing us a service in finding directions ahead of the rest of us. But for the same reason advocates of a cultural conservatism still tenable earlier in the century could hardly avoid seeing the people of Marx and Trotsky, Freud, Irving Berlin and Sam Goldwyn as uniquely placed to disrupt and debase their endangered values; and at a time when the Holocaust was not yet imaginable, why shouldn't they say so?"

The relevance of this to Mr Wilson's reflections is that we have no right to judge the anti-Jewish prejudices so freely expressed by some of the best writers before the 1940s in terms of a single ideal model of anti-Semitism as "the King of Myths" which "gives expression not to a true conflict but to a false solution", and "makes poetry bad because it is predicated on a flight from reality".

ELIOT's anti-Semitism was of the same sort as the cultural anti-Americanism flourishing in England during the same period. His horror of moneyed Jewish vulgarians taking over from men of culture, his wince of distaste for Bleistein the "Chicago Semite Viennese" (who for an English cultural snob would have been just another American), are not yet the obsession "predicated on a flight from reality" which can justly be diagnosed in Pound. There is nothing factually wrong about his belief that socially rootless Jews (not the old Sephardic families which he respected as having a tradition behind them) were contributing more than their statistically probable share to the modern trends which he evaluated as disruptive and degrading; it is his commitment to the Western and Christian tradition which makes him disapprove of them. Is Mr Wilson's phrasing (". . . to a false solution") intended to suggest that Eliot was disposed to see a Jewish conspiracy as the *solution* to the problem of why modern civilisation has gone wrong? The poet's imagination dwells with fascinated disgust on Gentile representatives of cultural dissolution, Sweeney and the small house agent's clerk, for much longer than on Bleistein. To understand Eliot we have to make the imaginative effort to think ourselves back into prehistory before the Holocaust, and recall that once upon a time the role of the Jews in contemporary culture could be *honestly* questioned.

A. C. GRAHAM

University of Hawaii

A. C. GRAHAM's gratitude to the Jews for their contribution to modern sensibility is well put, his defence of pre-1940s anti-Semitism is not. To attempt to justify the free expression and publication of anti-Jewish prejudices prior to 1940, on the grounds that the Holocaust had not yet occurred, is astonishing. It is also specious to argue that Eliot's anti-Semitism was an honest response to the "factually correct" belief that "socially rootless Jews" were "contributing more than their statistically probable share" towards the undermining of a cherished Christian tradition. Eliot's prejudice was not expressed in measured tones. It was not his commitment to the Christian tradition that moved him to write: "The rats are underneath the piles. The jew is underneath the lot."

The fact that anti-Semitism was (or is) part and parcel of "English cultural snobbism" does not allow us to take it for granted, or attenuate its odiousness. On the contrary, we are enjoined to inquire into its psychological and social origins. The *internal* reality from which, I suggested, the anti-Semite takes flight is a conflict located in his own mind. It is the breakdown of courage in dealing with this that leads to "the false solution".

STEPHEN WILSON

Oxford

WE NOTE, *with regret and deep sadness, the passing of* ENCOUNTER *contributors and friends in 1989*

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Life & Letters Today

Karlsruhe

HOW TO SUCCEED: **Can failure be declared illegal? It was once the desperate dream of pupils and students who just couldn't get through. And then it became the educational utopia of certain progressive pedagogues who wanted everybody to be "equal" and contended that grades, examinations and degrees only maximise human inequalities.**

Well, the German Supreme Court here in Karlsruhe didn't take on the ultimate philosophical issue; but it did make a few decisions that were relevant and material. In the first place, is a "multiple choice" questionnaire constitutional and permissible? The Court interpreted the West German Constitution (the *Grundgesetz*) as consistent with "multiple choice" methods; it seemed to the judges to be very democratic. But the absolutism of the standard by which 60% of all the answers must be answered correctly for a student to pass the exam seemed autocratic and undemocratic. If it were "relativised" a bit by the university examiners, it might square with the Constitution.

So the three medical students who had fought the suit through the Courts all the way up to Karlsruhe's "supremos" passed one and failed one. But the final defeat came in their third suit, namely, their appeal to *Artikel 12* of the *Grundgesetz* (which has to do with "freedom in the professions"), to be allowed to repeat the Doctor of Medicine exams, after two previous failures. The Court decided that the fixed rule was legal, and that endless repetition was straining justice in this case. "Twice is enough."

DER TAGESSPIEGEL

London

FINE FLYING: **A US Navy plane got a parking ticket after it overshot the runway at a British air base and landed on a road.**

A Thames Valley police sergeant slapped the £12.00 fine on the Viking S-3 anti-submarine plane despite its pilot's protests.

The plane from the aircraft carrier Theodore Roosevelt overshot the runway while landing at a Royal Air Force base in southern England where it was due to fly in an air show.

The local police chief eventually waived the fine after consultations with authorities at the air base.

INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE

London

BARDOLOGY: *Kenneth Branagh's new film version of "Henry V" has been tirelessly compared with Laurence Olivier's. But in the greatest moment of the play, the St Crispin's Day speech before Agincourt, Branagh gets the fifth line wrong, transposing the words "live" and "see" to declaim: "He that shall see this day and live old age". Thus making nonsense of the line.*

Clearly, (a) Branagh had not learnt his lines, (b) he did not understand them, and (c) nobody noticed, or cared. Comparisons with Olivier are ludicrous.

SUNDAY TELEGRAPH

London

YEATS'S ACQUITTAL: *I [Peter Simple] have occasionally written about the serious erosion, by continual quotation, of parts of Yeats's great poem "The Second Coming". The use by journalists and politicians of such passages as* **"Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold"** *and so on was becoming so common at one time that I suggested fines and, if that failed, imprisonment as the only way of saving the poem from complete destruction.*

Lately, I'm glad to say, things have improved. It is some time since a politician informed us that the best lacked all conviction, while the worst were full of passionate intensity.

What then, is to be said of the Dublin Contemporary Dance Theatre interpreting the poem in terms of movement? Does this call for the death penalty?

On the whole, I think not. The dance itself is wordless. And Yeats, who would be angry at finding his words in the mouths of people he would think low-bred and dishonest, himself used dancers in his later plays and might well approve.

DAILY TELEGRAPH

London

PAST OVER: **History deals with those events and personalities which have large and dramatic effects on lives and imaginations [writes Robert Skidelsky]. That is why so much of history is about war and revolution. That explains the concentration on acts of government and great people. When what kings and queens did had important effects, their actions held the centre of the stage. In any history of twentieth-century Britain, our Royal Family will get little attention. It has virtually ceased to be historical.**

THE INDEPENDENT

Hamburg

TSCHÖRMEN IS' AUT: *How much longer will our strict German linguists continue their campaign against the "Fremdwörterinvasion", the dreaded invasion of foreign words, mostly English and American? The battle is long since lost.*

I see [writes Dieter Zimmer] that this weekend's Hamburg cinema programmes are showing (and I cite their "German" titles):

"Desert Hearts . . . Wish You Were Here . . . Jumpin' Jack Flash . . . Police Academy 5 . . . 'Odipussy' . . . Dirty Dancing . . . The Dead . . . He's My Girl. . . ."

I suppose that out of this repertory I would have preferred, say, "Oedipussy": a little more convincing. But, as they say in the German film world, why—let—we—it—not—like? Simply that English for us adds a touch of redeeming exoticism everybody here is so keen on. Anyway it evidently saves money—and saves the embarrassment of boobs making bloomers. "Schmutzige Tanzdiele" for Dirty Dancing; "Blauen Brüder" for Blues Brothers; "In Kentucky gebratener Film" for the Kentucky Fried Movie. **"Is' was, Doc?",** *which does justice to the Barbra Streisand masterpiece, solves all problems, although "Is' what, Dok?" might have packed even more German fans into the kinos.*

Let's face it: **Tschörmen is' aut!**

DIE ZEIT

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FRENCH DAGUERREOTYPES

Janet E. Buerger

Foreword by Walter Clark, Technical Appendix by Alice Swan

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